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COMICS FEATURE

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October No. 6

the mind of an editor: LEN WEIN interviewed

Marriage for Superheroes Threat or Menace?

The Fandom Zone

The Silver Age of Comics!

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COMICS FEATURE

October No. 6

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LEN WEIN SPEAKS!

a penetrating look at the job of a DC Comics editor.

MARRIAGE AND SUPER-HEROES

Two views: Why they *should* do it—why they rarely survive.

WOMEN IN TERRY and the PIRATES.

The femmes fatales of the great American adventure comic strip. First of a series!

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A special report from Jay Zilber on why anyone would and should publish a fanzine.

Bob Jennings reviews fanzines.

Plus convention listings, a special bonus cover, and more!

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European comics aren't all *ASTERIX*, or so says Brad Walker. And wait 'til you hit Smurf City!

Guilty Fantasies

You read it here first! Peter Gillis' dreams come true—and they *really do!!*

The Silver Age of Comics

Our continuing historical overview of comics' second major boom, and the changes that came out of it. With special reports on *Warren Magazines, The X-Men,* and *the "New Look" Batman.*

by Brian Boerner, with Richard Howell and Richard Morrisey

Reality As Imagination

Peter Gillis reviews McGregor's and Rogers' new *DETECTIVES, INC.* project.

End Notes

Peter Sanderson critiques the films of Tex Avery in a knowledgeable and touching farewell to one of the great cartoon animators of our time.

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COMICS FEATURE

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HOW CAN YOU BEAT IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH
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JIM STARLIN
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LEN WEIN
ARCHIE GOODWIN
BORIS VALLEJO
LEONARD STARR
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FIND OUT WHAT THE PROS REALLY TALK ABOUT!!!
A
Q
WE PLAY THE GAME RIGHT BY BRINGING YOU NEWS UPDATES AND EXCLUSIVES!!!
YOU'LL KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING IN COMICS WHEN IT HAPPENS!!!
PLUS OUR CONTINUING FANDOM ZONE SECTION FEATURING FANDOM ORIGINS LISTINGS AND ADVICE
Q
K
YOU CAN'T PASS UP COMPREHENSIVE ARTICLES ON
THE DEATH OF THE ROMANTIC INTEREST IN COMICS
MODESTY BLAISE
THE MICRONAUTS
WOMEN IN TERRY AND THE PIRATES
THE SILVER AGE OF COMICS
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NEWS EXCLUSIVES

EXPERT COLUMNISTS

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OPENING NOTES

PUBLISHER'S STATEMENT
BY HAL SCHUSTER

A group of colorful men march off a field in close formation. Equally colorful men stalk onto the field and take up their positions. The changing of the guard--there are few things as colorful or as stunning. This issue of *COMICS FEATURE* marks the changing of the guard. As with other changings of the guard, the traditions will continue. The spirit, the essence will be the same.

There will be new faces, but there will also be old faces. Peter Sanderson, our erudite associate editor, will continue as before. The major columns, Peter Sanderson's own, Jay Zilber's, Bob Jennings' Peter Gillis', will remain the same. We will be improving on and continuing the current features that now exist. The *FANDOM ZONE* will be expanded begining next issue with a new and permanent column being done by Don and Maggie Thompson. This, along with Bob Jennings' *"Ride the Tiger"* and Jay Zilber's *"Trufan Confessions"* should make the *FANDOM ZONE* larger and even better than before. Of course our incisive and informative interviews will continue. Our historical analysis of the comic scene, which has been one of the mainstays of the magazine, will continue on as before and, in fact, will be expanded upon. When the *"History of the Silver Age"* runs out, we'll be continuing with a series called *"The Lost Comic Companies"*, which will cover every missing comics company from Ajax and Centaur to EC to the Atlas of only a few years ago. We will also be adding additional smaller articles on other aspects of the history and traditions of comics.

Elsewhere in the magazine, the new editors, RICHARD HOWELL and CAROL KALISH will be introducing you to what can be expected in the future from *COMICS FEATURE*, and the expansion of the text magazine line to include *ARTFORM, BRUSH STROKES, LOC,* and *EMPIRE OF BRITISH FANTASY*. As with *COMICS FEATURE*, these will be the best possible magazines, in the best possible formats--always with good type!--that can possibly be put out devoted to those topics. Each title will be edited by the people who know the subject best. Each will be graphically designed to be eye-appealing.

This will become another mainstay of the *COMIC FEATURE*/New Media Publishing line: good graphics. With the addition of Richard Howell, our graphic capacity will be taking a tremendous upsurge, and we are buying all our own equipment--typesetting and otherwise--so that we can continue to improve all features of all of our magazines.

New Media Publishing is on the move once again with expansion, growth, and good product. We hope to continue having your support and the support of many other people interested in comics, so that this field may continue to grow both in enjoyment and in knowledge.

One last closing note: I myself lay down the original foundation of this magazine. I worked with Dean Mullaney in designing what would appear in the magazine, contributed many of the features that are now mainstays of the magazine. Dean and I worked together on so many ideas, in fact, that sometimes it's hard to tell which were my ideas and which were Dean's--and which were both of ours. As Dean said last issue, *COMICS FEATURE* was very much a child created by both of us with love and caring. I will continue as publisher and I will see that this caring also continues.

CAPTAIN CANUCK

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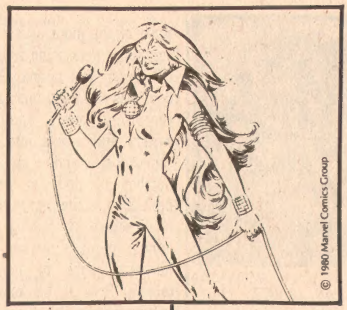
DAZZLER FIRST ISSUE TO APPEAR ONLY IN FAN SHOPS!!

In a revolutionary move that acknowledges the rapid growth in the volume of comics sold in comics specialty shops, Marvel is distributing *DAZZLER* #1 solely to direct sale outlets. Curtis Circulation Company will not be handling any copies, and as a result there will be no UPC box on the cover, which will feature a camera-separated painting by Bob Larkin. This first issue will be shipped in November and go on sale in December. A quarter of a million copies have been ordered by the specialty shops and are being printed; this number is only a little less than the usual number of copies Marvel prints of a first-issue comic that is distributed to both newsstands and direct sales outlets.

With issue #2, Curtis will begin distributing *DAZZLER* and hence it will begin appearing at newsstands.

It was explained that Marvel can make more money selling *DAZZLER* #1 this way than through the usual method of distribution because the direct sales market has grown so large, now accounting for thirty percent of Marvel's sales. Marvel will only print the number of copies that the shops have ordered, and hence there will be no waste. It is also felt that selling *DAZZLER* #1 only through the specialty shops will make it more of a collector's item, and thus more valuable to the collector's market.



Marvel editor-in-chief Jim Shooter calls this plan for distributing *DAZZLER* #1 a "gift" and "a pat on the back" to the direct sales outlets as a "reward" for selling so many comics for Marvel.

Since Marvel now publishes more story pages in its comics, the Dazzler's origin tale has been inserted into the first issue's story, which was originally done for the 17-page format. Also, certain changes are being made in the story to bring it in line with current continuity. The Fantastic Four, Avengers, and New X-Men all guest star in the first issue, in the first joint meeting of all three groups with their present memberships, but Cyclops has been removed from the story since he has left his team.

Casablanca Records and Filmworks was originally interested in doing a *DAZZLER* feature film for which Shooter wrote a treatment, but they pulled out of the project later. As a result, the publication of *DAZZLER* #1 was held off while Marvel tried to interest other filmmakers in the character, who had originally been conceived as a means of getting a tie-in between Marvel and a record company, after all. Shooter asserts that there may still be a *DAZZLER* movie, but that he and Stan Lee decided to publish the comic now because of their "faith in the character."

MARVEL SAILS NEW FLAGSHIP!

MARVEL FANFARE is the working title of the 32-page "no ads" four-color comic Marvel currently plans to sell for sixty cents. Although it will be sold both at newsstands and direct sales outlets, it is being designed with the fan market in mind. Shooter asserts that *MARVEL FANFARE* will be "*the* Marvel comic that the fans should buy": it will, he says, be the "flagship book" of the line and the "insider's book" intended for "discerning readers." Besides featuring the work of creative teams popular with fans on major Marvel characters, it will have a Bullpen Bulletins page, unlike the other comics, with which Shooter hopes to restore the friendly feeling the page generated between pros and fans in the 1960s. Hence, *MARVEL FANFARE* will be what Shooter calls the "spokestitle" of the Marvel line. The book will be a monthly, but it is still not scheduled. Shooter anticipates no trouble over the book's name from the publishers of *FANFARE*, a magazine that covers comics and animation, among other topics.

LEVITZ, ORLANDO PROMOTED! GIORDANO RETURNS AS EDITOR!!

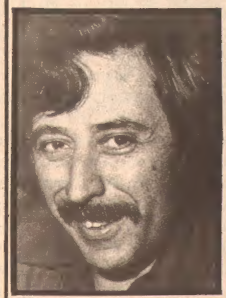
This month DC unexpectedly announced several promotions. Paul Levitz, formerly the Editorial Co-ordinator of DC Comics, has just been promoted to the position of the company's Business Manager. Although Levitz will still be retaining his position as general co-ordinator of the comic line (a job which requires him to oversee the scheduling and traffic controls associated with comic production) as well as assuming the responsibilities of his new position, it seems unlikely at this writing that he will continue to act as regular editor of any of DC's books. Depending on his workload, he might continue on some of his writing assignments. (Levitz writes *"The Huntress"* featurette in *WONDER WOMAN* every month, as well as irregularly contributing to some of the anthology titles.)

Joe Orlando has also received a promotion. He is now Editorial Director. Jack C. Harris, spokesman for DC, explained that the promotion will not require a redefinition of Orlando's workload and said, "We see it more as an expansion of his former position." Orlando's former title had been Managing Editor of DC Comics.

PAUL LEVITZ

To compensate for Paul Levitz's departure as an active editor, DC has convinced one of their former editorial stars to return. Dick Giordano will be assuming most, if not all, of the books that Levitz will be abandoning, starting sometime in either October or November. Giordano's extensive editorial experience includes his having been Editor-in Chief at Charlton Comics during their highly acclaimed period of expansion during the middle 1960s. He went from there to an editorial position at DC Comics in the late '60s, handling *THE TEEN TITANS, AQUAMAN, HOT WHEELS, HOUSE OF SECRETS,* and *BEWARE THE CREEPER*—all highly experimental books under Giordano's tenure, and including (in the opinions of many) some of the more artistically successful work being done at DC during that period. Giordano was also intstrumental in recruiting many younger writers and artists into the comics field, and a sizeable number of today's young professionals cite him as their main source of training and encouragement during the formative days of their careers. Prior to his newest employment at DC, Giordano had been under contract to them as a penciller and inker (for the latter of which he has won many industry awards, including the prestigious Alley Award), and was one of the artists working on the DC line of promotional and licensed material.

R.H. & C.K.



DICK GIORDANO

WEIN WRITES

Len Wein has taken on several writing assignments at DC, while still maintaining his status as a full-time editor of some of their top comics. He has been assigned *THE BRAVE AND THE BOLD* on a regular basis, with his first story being a Batman-Scalphunter team-up. (Batman travels to Scalphunter's time courtesy of Professor Nichols, a *BATMAN/WORLD'S FINEST* supporting character from the early 1960s who recently appeared in *SUPER FRIENDS*.) Wein has also written a Superman-Robin team-up for *DC PRESENTS*, and a *JONAH HEX* story featuring Hex in a wheelchair.

These assignments are in addition to Wein's upcoming *"Bat Lash"* series and his work on the upcoming *BATMAN/HULK* tabloid.

S&S SPLIT

Marvel has parted ways with Simon & Schuster, but may itself assume the publication of the books they were licensing to S&S, including the *ORIGINS OF MARVEL COMICS*-style reprint books, the *MARVEL FUN AND GAMES* books, and the prose novels.

NEW MEDIA EXPANDS PUBLISHING BASE COMICS AND COMMENTARY MAGAZINES TO BEGIN!

Hal Schuster, head of New Media/Arjax, the comics distribution company which publishes *COMICS TURE*, has formed a new company that will publish a line of comics and a series of magazines commenting on the comics medium. This new company, New Media Publications, will have Schuster as publisher, *COMICS FEATURE* columnist and former Marvel writer Peter B. Gillis as editorial director, and *COMICS FEATURE* contributors Richard Howell and Carol B. Kalish as production manager and circulation director, respectively.

COMIC PLANS OUTLINED

The new comics magazines will be edited by Peter Gillis with Howell and Kalish serving as consulting editors and Schuster as publisher. The line will be headed by the two flagship titles, which Schuster has named *ADVENTURE ILLUSTRATED* and *FANTASY ILLUSTRATED*. Each will be a sixty-four page black-and-white magazine with full-color covers, and with forty-eight pages of comics. The remaining pages will consist of editorials, letters pages, ads, articles, and even portfolios and short stories. At the beginning, at least, the two magazines will be published quarterly. The tentative price per issue is two dollars.

Each issue of the two magazines will contain four comics stories, each self-contained, but each built around its own continuing character who will appear in every issue. Gillis intends to have major comics writers and artists creating and working on each series for the two magazines. It is planned that creators will own their own characters, but will license first serial and merchandising rights to New Media Publications and receive royalties and percentages of the merchandising profits. At this writing Gillis has already spoken with a number of major comics writers and artists, several of whom have expressed interest.

Although New Media Publications may come out with some super-hero comics in the future, the company intends to concentrate on other genres instead. *FANTASY ILLUSTRATED* will deal in science fiction and fantasy while *ADVENTURE ILLUSTRATED* will offer non-fantasy adventure tales such as westerns, gangster stories, spy thrillers, pirate adventures, and stories with historical settings or pseudo-historical ones like Camelot. Gillis himself will be writing a new western series for *ADVENTURE ILLUSTRATED*.

Series that prove successful in the two flagship books will leave them and be spun off into their own magazines. Some may receive their own magazines right after the first issues of *FANTASY* and *ADVENTURE ILLUSTRATED*. Each spinoff magazine will have 30 pages and sell for $1.25.

The proposed super-hero comics will probably be done by new comics professionals rather than established ones, who will instead be recruited for the flagship books and their spinoffs for the most part.

New Media will also revive *STAR-STUDDED COMICS* as a showcase for fan artists and writers who want to become professionals. Through *STAR-STUDDED* they will be able to work with an editor (Gillis) and artist (Howell) on honing their material, get to have it published, and even receive payment. There will be no restrictions on subject matter.

No dates have yet been set for the publication of any of the comics. However, it is intended that as many as eight spinoff comics may appear within the first twelve months of publication.

NMP COMMENTARY MAGAZINES

The New Media Publications line of "commentary magazines" will be edited by Richard Howell and Carol Kalish, with Hal Schuster serving as publisher and Peter Gillis as editorial director. The line will consist of four magazines.

First of course, is *COMICS FEATURE*, which will continue to appear monthly and to carry its regular features (e.g. the feature interview, *"Headlines"*, *"Guilty Fantasies"*, *"Endnotes"*, *"The Fandom Zone"*, *"The Silver Age of Comics"*, the comic strip column, etc.). Kalish says that the magazine's editorial stance will continue unchanged.

ARTFORM: COMMENTARY ON SEQUENTIAL ART is second, a quarterly dealing with the aesthetics of the comics medium. It is intended to fill the void for serious comics criticism left by the *HARVARD JOURNAL OF PICTORAL FICTION*. First issue due in December.

LOC takes its name from the fandom acronym for "letters of comment" and will contain reviews and columns by noted fans and commentators on any subject of interest to readers of comics. Kalish sees *LOC* dealing both with reviews of currently released comic books, strips, and cartoons, and with reviews of "classic examples" of work in the comics medium. She hopes to see the magazine "grappling with questions and controversies peculiar to comics." Submissions of any length and on any comics-related topic are invited from anyone who is interested. LOC will begin as a bimonthly and will sell for the same price as *COMICS FEATURE*. The first issue is due out in October.

Finally, there is *BRUSH STROKES*, which Howell states will be like *CARTOONIST PROFILES*, but with an emphasis on comic book art. *BRUSH STROKES* will feature interviews with professional comics artists in their techniques, articles about those techniques with an emphasis on storytelling, and biographies of comics artists. Howell wants to be able to invite young non-professional comics artists to submit two or three pages each of sample continuity to *BRUSH STROKES* and have a professional comics artist give a critique of them within the magazine. *BRUSH STROKES* will be a quarterly, and the first issue is scheduled for release in March.

Contributors of articles for any of the four magazines will be paid, according to *COMICS FEATURE*'s policy.

Peter Sanderson will remain as associate editor of *COMICS FEATURE* and will focus his attention on the news, *"Endnotes"*, and occasional feature articles and interviews. He has also been made associate editor of *LOC* and reviews editor for *ARTFORM*, as well as being editor of Mark Gruenwald's *OMNIVERSE*, which is published independently of New Media Publications.

OUTSIDE PROJECTS

Howell and Kalish will continue to edit the comic strip reprint magazine *CHAPTERS* for publisher Leo Giroux Jr.'s Devil's Trident Publications. (Although *CHAPTERS* is exclusively distributed by New Media/Irjax, it has no connection with New Media Publications.) *CHAPTERS* will increase its page count from twenty-four to thirty-two pages with issue #5. With that issue, the magazine will begin running classic sequences from Chester Gould's *DICK TRACY* and Dale Messick's *BRENDA STARR*, along with two new strips being done specifically for *CHAPTERS: SPICY· THIRD REICH STORIES* by Leo Giroux Jr. and Arcana (an installment of which has previously appeared in *THE SCIENCE FICTION TIMES*) and a jungle strip called *GANI* by Giroux and Howell. Further plans call for a substantial page increase with either issue #6 or #7 (and attendant price rise from $1.25 to $2.00 per issue). The additional pages will allow *CHAPTERS* to print at *least* two weeks' continuity of each title they feature.

Howell will also continue to write and illustrate his own alternative comic book, *PORTIA PRINZ OF THE GLAMAZONS*. After a long hiatus, the first issue in the new *PORTIA* series (Vol. II, #1) is scheduled to appear in November. It will reprint the first installment of *"Glamazon's Burden"* and offer a new story, *"Eight to De Bar"* detailing the beginning of the Portia-Lenore DeBar feud. There will also be an introduction by Richard and Wendy Pini of *ELFQUEST*, a text piece on the history of the Glamazons, and new color covers. Contrary to previous reports, this issue will appear under the banner of Howell's Desperado-Eastern, and not that of Fantagraphics. —*P.S.*

NEW TEAM ON STAR WARS COMIC

Marvel's best-selling *STAR WARS* comic has been reassigned: David Michelinie and Al Williamson are the new regular team. The book's former writer, Archie Goodwin, will be doing more work for the Star Wars Corporation, though.

WHITNEY ELLSWORTH DIES!

Whitney Ellsworth, former Editorial Director of DC Comics during the 1940s and 1950s, died unexpectedly on September 8, 1980. Although he had retired from DC in 1970, Ellsworth maintined close contact with his former associates. He will be sorely missed.

Ellsworth was best known as one of the writers for the *BATMAN* comic books in the 1950s. He also was the original writer of the *BATMAN* comic strip in the 1960s. In addition to his scripting and editorial work on the DC Line, Ellsworth was also the producer of the classic *SUPERMAN* television series. He held the job from 1953 until the program ended in 1957.

IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA, THE

FUNNY PAGES

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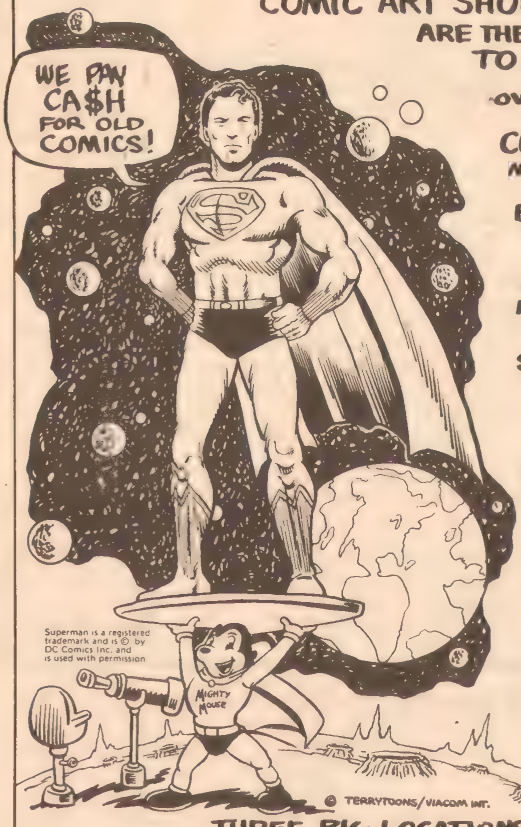

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ROY THOMAS

ROY'S DC ASSIGNMENTS ANNOUNCED!

According to Jack C. Harris, Roy Thomas—longtime Marvel Comics scripter whose contract with DC went into effect on September 1st of this year—has received his initial assignments from DC. Current plans call for him to write an average of 100 pages of comics per month (or four monthly books), and will be doing some fill-in work while his new projects are in preparation. He has been given the job of dialoguing two *GREEN LANTERN* stories over plots by Len Wein, and he will also dialogue at least one *SUPERGIRL* story.

The first of Thomas' personalized projects at DC is a revival of the Justice Society of America book under a new name, *THE ALL-STAR SQUADRON*. Thomas intends to place the series in the 1940s, using some, but not all, of the established roster of the JSA. In addition, he plans to occasionally feature other 1940s super-heroes, heretofore unconnected with the JSA, in the continuity. Likely candidates include the original Robotman and the Golden Age Sandman. Eventually, Thomas is expected to create a few new characters who will be candidates for JSA membership. All in all, Thomas' plans seem much like his earlier very successful strategy used on his other foray into 1940s-period comics, Marvel's *THE INVADERS*, No artist has yet been assigned to the strip.

In addition to *THE ALL-STAR SQUADRON*, Thomas is also creating a new sword-and-sorcery character. DC spokesman Jack C. Harris has been very careful to avoid the using the term "barbarian" in his description of the new Thomas concept, and emphasized that Thomas is *not* re-creating *CONAN*. It has been reported that Thomas is doing a good deal of historical research for the strip and that he tentatively plans to set the continuity in the Dark or Middle Ages. Thus, comparisons to Harold Foster's *PRINCE VALIANT* rather than to Howard's *CONAN* seem to be more in line with the facts.

Finally, Thomas has been assigned the *BATMAN* title, but reports are that he is willing to switch to some other title in place of *BATMAN* if a suitable opportunity presents itself.

—R.H.

EPIC #4 PREVIEW

Michael W. Kaluta has done the cover for the fourth issue of Marvel's *EPIC ILLUSTRATED*, which has among its contents Ken Steacy's adaptation of Harlan Ellison's *"Sleeping Dogs,"* which may be the first of a series. Other features include *"Delloran Revisited,"* which is the seventh chapter of Jim Starlin's *"Metamorphosis Odyssey,"* part three of Robert E. Howard's *"Almuric,"* by Roy Thomas and Tim Conrad, and the second part of Michael Moorcock's Eliric saga *"The Dreaming City,"* as adapted by Thomas and Craig Russell. *EPIC #4* also contains *"Retrospect,"* written by B.K. Taylor with art by James Fox; *"Survivors,"* written and illustrated by Paul Kirchner; *"Solar Plexus,"* written and illustrated by Ric Veitch; *"elephant Brass,"* written and illustrated by Mark Hempel; an article on science fiction, fantasy, and the graphic novel, probably by Archie Goodwin; and a portfolio by the renowned Japanese cartoonist Shotaro Ishimori.

CHARLTON BEGINS EXPERIMENTAL FAN PROGRAM!

Charlton Comics, the Derby, Connecticut comic publishing house, recently announced the beginning of a new system of reviewing and hiring young artists—on what is basically a fanzine basis but with professional industry standards applied. Their press release reads:

"Recently a young artist from Florida traveled all the way to Derby CT to offer his artwork to us, free of charge, for the opportunity to appear in four color print, in hopes of establishing enough pro credits to impress the BIG TWO...a not uncommon occurance throughout comic book history which has successfully kept the standard of payment in this field ridiculouly low...Who are we at Charlton to deny these aspirants an opportunity?

The writer then goes on to state that Charlton will not be

actively seeking out young talent, but if the young talent wants to come to them, then they will consider printing their stories in Charlton publications, more or less *gratis*.

All work will be subject to Charlton's editorial standards, and the creators of any new characters published by Charlton will retain ownership of those characters. Charlton, needless to say, retains ownership of their own characters. Also, each contributor will receive 50 copies of the comic in which their material appears.

Charlton hopes to impress on potential applicants that this new arrangement is not a license for fans to do fan-quality books for other fans and have Charlton publish them. Charlton has always had very rigorous standards as regards the accessibility of whatever stories they publish, and their main trade has traditionally been with the casual reader.

The writer of the press release referred anyone interested in the new system to editor George Wildman or assistant editor Bill Pearson at Charlton Comics, Derby CT, 06418 (Phone (203) 735-3381). Assurances were given that Charlton personnel would try "to make this a positive and pleasant experience for all who participate."

NOTES FROM A STERN

Roger Stern, the scripter generally credited with the turnaround in quality in Marvel's long-stagnant *CAPTAIN AMERICA* and *PETER PARKER, THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN* comics has been assigned the writing chores of the similarly-benighted *DOCTOR STRANGE* series as well. His first issue will be #46. Although Stern asserts that *DOCTOR STRANGE* has "always been an okay-selling, middle-range book", and that it is not in any sales difficulty presently, according to the previous scripter, Chris Claremont when *he* was assigned to guide the book it had been being considered for cancellation. There was no significant upsurge in sales under Claremont.

Stern is filled with ideas for his return to *DOCTOR STRANGE* (he had previously written several issue in the #20s and #30s of the title, and plotted up to the end of the "Dweller in Darkness" series), and plans to get them to as wide a readership as possible by keeping the stories contained in one-issue or two-issue segments, rather than continuing with the rambling storylines which may have been a barrier to new readers.

ROGER STERN

His first issue will contain a "possession" story set in North Carolina which will introduced the entity "Ikonn" (whose "Images of..." Doctor Strange has been calling on for some seventeen years). Following that will be a guest shot by Brother Voodoo from *STRANGE TALES*. Stern's plans after that become less specific.

"I want to guest-star a lot of Marvel's other mystic characters in Doc's book," says Stern, "and contrast the different powers and methods operation between Dr. Strange and them. I'm planning to do a story where Dr. Druid finds a mystical menace that's beyond the range of *his* powers, so he calls on Doc Strange, and then plays Watson to Doc's Holmes for the issue." Appearances by other Marvel mystical characters are under consideration as well, including Agatha Harkness and the Enchantress.

"I'd like to do things with the Doc/Clea relationship, too, I'm planning on playing with the fact that while Clea is his lover, she's also his disciple and he's supposed to be training her. What would happen if she failed on one of her quizzes? Would that affect their relationship?" Stern is also planning to emphasize Clea's growing expertise and independence, as well as her control over her own progress. When questioned, Stern admits that he had never meant for the Strange/Clea/Victoria Bentley situation to become as Weisinger-Lois-Lane-comic-y as it eventually did. "Strange has no romantic feeling for Victoria at all," says Stern, "although she's always had the hots for him. Clea should be above all that cat-fighting business. She's from another dimension, and is Strange's aide and disciple —she knows that she's the perfect woman for him, and she knows that he thinks so too. Clea should regard Victoria Bentley like you'd regard one of your husband's lowlife relatives, like 'There's my husband's dippy cousin from the Poconos. She's a social embarassment, but I've got to put up with her.' "

Stern also plans to script a retelling and expansion of Doctor Strange's training and his early years (months?) as a sorcerer. Stern mentions that Dr. Strange's first independent case has never been shown, nor have the readers ever been told how Strange got his Eisner-esque mansion, or

how he first met the Human Torch (who already knew Doc prior to their first recorded meeting in *FANTASTIC FOUR* #27). Stern feels that the Torch and Strange's having shared a double-feature comic in the early 1960s (*STRANGE TALES*) is an insufficient explanation. "Heck," says Stern, "I can't even remember them talking to each other across those old split covers!"

Gene Colan will remain the book's interior pencil artist, and will soon assume the cover artist chores as well. Colan is one of Stern's personal favorites on the feature, and he is quite pleased with the choice. "Although the guy I'd love to see just *one issue* is the one who won't do it!" Two non-Colan issues of *DOCTOR STRANGE* have been inventoried, including one drawn by Marshall Rogers, and one by the team of Peter Gillis/Carmine Infantino/Craig Russell.

Stern plans to retain the new supporting character of Sarah Wolfe, Dr. Strange's abrasive business manager, and to expand on her personality "to the point of having *UPSTAIRS/DOWNSTAIRS* routines with Wong," describes Stern. His retention of Wolfe is based on Stern's belief that the readers object to seeing new writers dispose indiscriminately of all the previous writer's groundwork, and that he doesn't like to "throw the baby out with the bath."

Along those same lines, *CAPTAIN AMERICA*, one of Stern's other projects, will soon be encountering many faces from his past. As was indicated in Stern's (and artist John Byrne's) first issue of this title (#247), they are interested in clearing up all the discarded plot elements of the past seven years and re-establishing a new, firm footing on which new situations can grow.

A two-part story set in England will account for Cap's non-memories of his WW II super-team The Invaders, and will reintroduce their greatest foe, Baron Blood. Cap's 40th Anniversary issue (#255) will recount and expand on his origin, attempting to make sense of the variations between the previous accounts of it, and present Cap's never-before-seen first case. Following that, The Swine and Doughboy (probably with Arnim Zola, the Bio-Fanatic) will resurface from the Kirby issues, and a new Foolkiller (last seen in *OMEGA THE UNKNOWN*#9) story is planned.

Stern hopes to keep Steve Rogers' private life moving along with involvements of one sort or another with Bernie Rosenthal, housemother (and soon-to-be matchmaker) Anna Kappelbaum, and the various friends and *SHOWCASE* characters in Steve's apartment house. Donna Maria Swine (who was shuffled offstage in between issues #212 and #213) will return eventually to complicate Cap's life further, and Stern is considering reintroducing Dave Cox, the conscientious objector from #162.

John Byrne and Joe Rubenstein will continue on the artwork indefinitely, although all of the 1940s scenes in the Anniversary issue (every page but the last one) will be reproduced directly from Byrne's pencils. Rubenstein will ink the final page.

INFANTINO BUSY AT DC!

Carmine Infantino has been enthusiastically welcomed back by the writers and editors at DC, and the amount of work he has been assigned reflects this. In addition to various single-story assignments (including a "*Space Museum*", an "*Adam Strange*", a Batman-Deadman team-up, and a Batman-Firestorm team-up) he has also been awarded the regular pencilling assigments on the new "*Dial H for Hero*" series, and, of course, on *THE FLASH*.

Infantino will recommence drawing the Scarlet Speedster's adventures with issue #296, in a story guest-starring long-time *FLASH* supporting character, the Elongated Man (whose 1960s series also featured Infantino's work). Unfortunately, Infantino returns one month too late to draw another favorite *FLASH* satellite showcased in #295's "In Grodd We Trust." Bob Smith will be Infantino's regular inker on the book. Regular *FLASH* scripter Cary Bates is reportedly extremely pleased with Infantino's work on his scripts. "I realized once I'd seen the pencils for #296 that I'd been writing my *FLASH* scripts for Carmine all along." The art is described to be full of Infantino's stylish layouts and trademarked strobe effects.

Editor Len Wein is planning to turn *THE FLASH* #300 into a celebration for Infantino fans, with many familiar faces returning. Although Infantino is the artist most associated with the Flash character, *THE FLASH* #300 will be the first of the magazine's centennial issues featuring the present-day Flash that he will have had a chance to draw. (*THE FLASH* #100 having featured the Golden Age Flash, and by the time of *THE FLASH*#200 had come out, Infantino had long since been promoted to Publisher of DC.) Wein is pleased that the enthusiasm surrounding the project is becoming known: "Carmine is a DC treasure, and should never have been allowed to get away."

In keeping with Infantino's new committments to DC and the large amount of time they will consume, he has dropped

Continued on page 14

MARVEL FAN SHOP PROJECTS EXPAND! GRAPHIC NOVELS PLANNED!!

Four volumes in the Marvel Graphic Novel Series, as it has now been titled, are to be released next year. The first will not appear for at least five months, and according to Marvel's Mike Friedrich, "probably longer." It is planned eventually to release twelve of the graphic novels per year. Shooter intends that the first release will be a *NEW X-MEN* graphic novel by the usual team of Chris Claremont, John Byrne, and Terry Austin. (Marvel is also considering publishing a prose novel about the New X-Men.) If the *NEW X-MEN* graphic novel does not turn out to be the first, then a graphic novel utilizing another Marvel property will become the initial release in the line.

Shooter is still leaning towards publishing the celebrated *DAREDEVIL* "Angel Dust" story as a graphic novel. Then, "much later," he says, it will probably be released in a lower-priced mass-distribution format: a black-and-white magazine, or even a four-color 32-page comic.

Before leaving Marvel, Roy Thomas was considering Barry Smith to do a *CONAN* graphic novel for the series; Shooter is now considering approaching Smith on the project himself.

The format of the Marvel graphic novels will be comparable to that of *HEAVY METAL'S ALIEN: THE ILLUSTRATED STORY*. Each will sell for around $3.95, although the price may be increased or decreased as work on the project continues.

Shooter says that the line will use both Marvel properties and properties that the creators will continue to own, as with Jim Starlin's projected spinoff from his *METAMORPHOSIS ODYSSEY* for the series. (Other projects already lined up for the series are; the Moorcock, Thomas, & Russell "Elric" book, *The Dreaming City"*, the Kirby-Englehart-Kane *PRISONER* book, and Starlin's book about the death of Captain Marvel.) Shooter asserts that Marvel wants to "try for a mix of new and different things" in the graphic novel series. Creative personnel on the books will receive royalties, even in the case of graphic novels utilizing Marvel characters.

Although the intial releases will probably only be sold in comics specialty shops, some later ones will probably be marketed in regular bookstores as well. "We want to be a book publishing company," Shooter declares, and not just one dealing in graphic novels either. Marvel's paperback version of its adaptation of *THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK* was "enormously successful," says Shooter, and Marvel has retained a consultant to investigate Marvel's entry into the book publishing field.

The "two-hundred-and-fifty-six-page comic book" which Shooter suggested Marvel publish for sale in regular bookstores is still under consideration. It is now conceived as a "Christmas present package" parents can buy for their children for five to ten dollars and which would be released in the fall.

Although Marvel is paying a great deal of attention now to books designed with fans specifically in mind, and even for sale only in "fan shops," Shooter says that Marvel wants to develop both the direct sales and newsstand markets. He believes that direct sales outlets and newsstands reach different markets and hence do not compete with each other, and notes that last year Marvel's sales grew in both the newsstand and the direct sales markets. —*P.S.*

BAT LASH RETURNS!

Bat Lash, the grinning, cultured, western anti-hero whose own magazine ran for a scant seven issues in the late 1960s, is being given another regular slot—in the back of *JONAH HEX*, courtesy of scripter Len Wein, artist Dan Spiegle and editor Ross Andru. The new series will commence immediately after the already-commissioned series of "*Scalphunter*" backups have run their course.

Wein is reportedly very excited about the decision, including the choice of Spiegle as artist. "The biggest stumbling block we always had in our discussion about reviving the *BAT LASH* comic was finding someone to fill Nick Cardy's shoes." Cardy, artist on six of the seven original *BAT LASH* issues (as well as on Bat's *SHOWCASE* appearance) is generally considered to be one of the great comic artists of the sixties and early seventies, and contributed greatly to the plots as well as to the visual style of the book. Like Cardy, the other *BAT LASH* alumnae, Joe Orlando, Dénny O'Neil, and Sergio Aragones (who was even a character in the book) have moved out of either the creative functions at DC, or

away from DC altogether, so an entirely new team was needed. Despite several guest-shots by Bat in *SCALPHUNTER*'s own book, the most promising reaction to the character came from a *"Bat Lash"* story in the *JONAH HEX SPECTACULAR DOLLAR COMIC* nearly two years ago. That story featured a lighter-toned story and Cardy-derived art by George Moltineri. Sadly, before any decision could be made to follow through with that story, Moltineri passed away.

Speigle is no stranger to the western genre, having drawn the *HOPALONG CASSIDY* comic strip for four years (1951-1955), and Dell's *MAVERICK* comic shortly thereafter. His talents also extend to the jungle-adventure genre (Gold Key's and ERB's *KORAK* comics), science fiction (*MAGNUS ROBOT FIGHTER* and *SPACE FAMILY ROBINSON*), period adventure (*THE SCARECROW* comic, among other movie adaptations), and big-foot cartooning (Marvel's *SCOOBY-DOO WHERE ARE YOU?*). Spiegle's work is unassumingly expert, impeccably composed, and cartoony enough to get across the more comedic aspects of *BAT LASH*'s *milieu*.

HEMBECK RETURNS!

YULE LOVE HEMBECK

Fred Hembeck, one of modern fandom's premiere satirist/commentators, will be preparing a new volume of his work for Thansgiving release. The book is called *BAH, HEMBECK!* and will be published by Fantaco. It will be in the same format as Hembeck's previous work, *ABBOT AND COSTELLO MEET THE BRIDE OF HEMBECK*, and will retail for $1.25. All of the material will be done especially for this volume, and at least some of it will feature a Christmas theme. This book will be released before Hembeck's *ZANY* #1.

WHO SOLD THE SURFER?

According to Jim Shooter, the forthcoming *SILVER SURFER* movie will be "substantially based" on the Simon & Schuster *SILVER SURFER* book by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby which was published a few years ago. No statement was released concerning any settlement with Kirby which might have to be made in light of the paperback's precedent-setting copyright (jointly copy-written by Lee and Kirby, rather than by Marvel), and Marvel's newly-established royalty system for the Graphic Novels (of which, arguably, *THE SILVER SURFER* was the first).

continued from page 12

his sole remaining Marvel assignment, *STAR WARS*, after a long, artistically and commercially successful collaboration with writer Archie Goodwin. The *STAR WARS* title has been one of Marvel's top sellers since the release of the initial movie in 1977, but even original scripter/adapter Roy Thomas admitted that Infantino's work on the series was "just what the book needed."

Now-former artist on *THE FLASH*, Don Heck, is presently without a regular assignment at DC, but editor Wein reports that Heck's work had been generally well-received on the book, up until the time Heck began inking his own pencils, at which time the reader reaction became "wildly favorable." Due to the success of their present collaboration, as well as a long-standing regard for Heck's skills, Wein is hoping to reassign Heck to one of the books within Wein's own jurisdiction.

BITS OF MARVEL BUSINESS

●Klaus Janson takes over the inking of *MOON KNIGHT* with issue #4. Frank Springer inked issues #2 and #3.

●No new writer or penciller has yet been picked to replace David Michelinie and George Perez on *THE AVENGERS*. In the meantime, fill-ins are being done by Chris Claremont (more than one), Bill Mantlo, John Buscema, and Dave Cockrum.

●Joe Brozowski becomes the regular artist on *STAR TREK* with issue #11.

●Denny O'Neil and Steve Skeates are now the regular writing team on *HOWARD THE DUCK*.

●Louise Jones takes over editing *THE SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN* magazine with issue #61.

●Trina Robbins and Steve Skeates have collaborated on a sixteen-page feature for *CRAZY* #70. The next issue will have a piece written and drawn by Paul Kirchner entitled *"Marvel Super-heroes That Didn't Quite Make It"*, as well as a parody of *THE SHINING*.

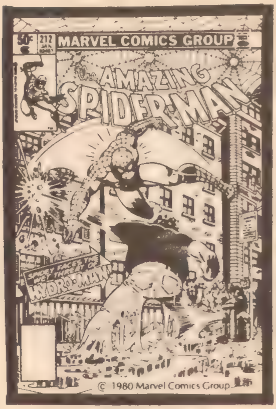
●Frank Miller has both written and drawn "Elektra" for *DAREDEVIL* #168, in which the hero meets a mysterious woman from his past. Miller also performed sole honors for the following issue, which pits Daredevil against both the Kingpin and Bullseye. No one has yet been chosen as the book's new regular writer, however, and other writers are currently working on *DAREDEVIL* plots.

● *MARVEL PREVIEW* #24 will now be *"Enigma"* formerly titled *"Paradox"*) by Bill Mantlo and Val Mayerik, while #25 will be the "women adventurers" issue with Michael Golden's *"Lady Daemon"*, a *"Black Widow"* story by Ralph Macchio and Paul Gulacy, and a *"Daughters of the Dragon"* tale by Denny O'Neil and Marshall Rogers.

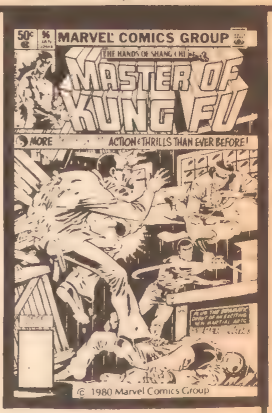
● *THE HULK!* magazine will go black-and-white with issue #24. The *"Dominic Fortune"* backups, however, will remain in color through the end of that series' run in issue #26. It has still not been decided what the new backup feature will be. Fortune's opponent in issue #25's "special Christmas story" is described as "a sadistic seven-foot-tall Santa Claus." J. Marc DeMatteis becomes the regular *HULK!* lead feature writer with issue #26; Gene Colan and Alfredo Alcala are the regular artists.

● Spider-Woman moves from Los Angeles to San Francisco in issue #35 of book, and she will encounter the Avengers in a forthcoming visit to New York. She will battle Hammer and Anvil in issue #34 (Chris Claremont's first issue as regular scripter), Angar the Screamer in #35, and the "all-new, all-female" Banshee in issue #36, which will guest star the New X-Men and Nick Fury.

● *AMAZING SPIDER-MAN* #212 introduces the villainous Hydro-Man (not to be confused with either Bill Everett's Golden Age creation of the same name—and with the same powers—or the Hydro-Men from *THE SUB-MARINER* most recently seen in *MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE*), who is described as being what to water what the Sandman (the Marvel version) is to sand. The Sub-Mariner guest-stars in issue #214, along with the Frightful Four.



● Upcoming in *IRON MAN* is the story of his first adventure after the one which comprised his origin. It will be told in a story written by David Michelinie and with art by Joe Brozowski and Bob Layton. It will appear in *IRON MAN* #144.

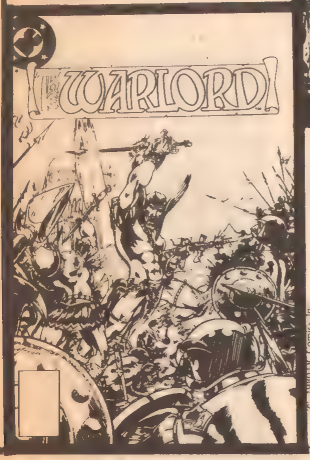


● Marvel is considering doing a regular monthly comic for the direct sales market only, probably having one regular feature and several non-series stories backing it up. Shooter says Marvel will try to get "name artists" for this book.

● The release date for the new *SUPERMAN-SPIDER-MAN* team-up book is now February.

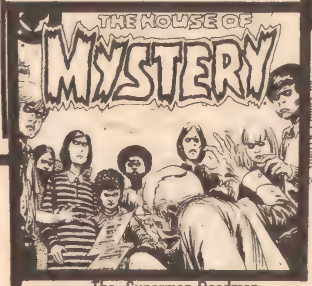
● The script for the second DC/Marvel team-up tabloid (in the new series) has been approved by Joe Orlando. Assuming that Jenette Kahn also approves the synopsis, production will begin immediately for a release early next year.

Len Wein's original story features the Joker and the Shaper of Worlds (who has previously appeared in *THE HULK* #155). Wein will be preparing the full script himself, and the art team is currently scheduled to be Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez and Dick Giordano.



● DC Comics will again be producing a *YEAR'S BEST STORIES* entry in their continuing series of digest reprint comics. According to some DC sources, the "Best Of..." selection process, and the promise of another chance next year, produces a "harmless, really fun competition between the staff. Everybody's making extra efforts to score with their peers." Although the final results are not yet in, the following lineup looks fairly certain:

"The Return of Johnathan Kent" two-parter from *ACTION* #507-8.



The Superman-Deadman team-up from *DC PRESENTS* #24.

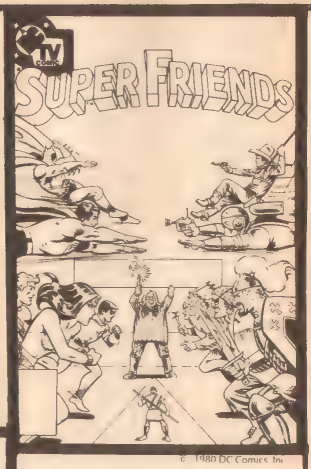
"Deadly Birthday, Dear Joker" from *BATMAN*.

"Brief Encounter," a *TIME WARP* story.

The *"Legion of Super-Heroes' "* Christmas story from last year's DC Christmas Spectacular Dollar Comic.

"A Bridge Called Charley," featuring Sgt. Rock.

"Vow of the Samurai," from *JONAH HEX*'s comic.



● No artist has yet been confirmed to replace Ramona Fradon on *SUPER FRIENDS*, one of DC's top-selling titles and a cult favorite among older fans. Fradon has assumed the illustration chores on Dale Messick's long-running *BRENDA STARR* comic strip (which Messick will still write) and no longer has the time to pencil the monthly 17-page adventures of the "TV Justice League." Fradon has been the book's regular penciller since the fourth issue (occasional fill-ins nonwithstanding) and her simplified-but-sophisticated design work greatly aided the purposefully deceptively simple style of the book.

Several replacements have been considered, and Romeo Tanghal and Vince Colletta have done an interim issue.

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THE MIND OF AN EDITOR:
LEN WEIN

Ask an average comic fan who their favorite editor is and you'll probably get back the name of the editor of his favorite comic. Ask that same fan what he thinks that editor does in the creation of the comic books he admires, and probably he won't have any idea! Too often readers remain in ignorance of the impact of comics editors on their different books, and the different working methods by which they achieve them.

Although WEIN has been interviewed before, COMICS FEATURE decided that the questions about his editorial philosophy and practice were too few, and far from enlightening. Len agreed to help us remedy that. This interview was conducted on September 7, 1980, at the World Science Fiction Convention in Boston. It was conducted by COMICS FEATURE *editors Richard Howell and Carol Kalish, edited by them, and copy-edited and approved by Wein.*

CF: The first thing we want to ask, by way of a warmup, is if *you'd* tell *us* about your career? We know that you worked for DC under different editors on several projects. Then you went to Marvel and now you're back at DC. Encapsulated.

LEN: Encapsulated!! Actually, there were a lot of other companies in the interim. Before I actually went to Marvel I worked for Gold Key, did some scripts for Warren while Marv Wolfman was still editor—wrote a *VAMPIRELLA* story or two, and worked for Skywald during its hour-and-a-half incarnation. There was a point when I was working for about ten different editors at about six or seven different companies all at the same time. Marvel was only a small part of it. I was doing some mystery stories for them and *THE GHOST RIDER* (in *WESTERN GUNFIGHTERS*)—the original *GHOST RIDER*. That was about all.

So I've been most everywhere. I started at DC—did about six month's work for them. Then I did a story with Marv Wolfman for *TEEN TITANS* that introduced a black super-hero.

CF: I've seen some of the artwork for that story. Nick Cardy drew that.

LEN: One of the best things he ever did. It was beautiful!

CF: That story ran into problems, didn't it?

LEN: Yep! Nick Cardy, who was working on the story at the time, was worried. This was back in 1968 still, and they were afraid that if we put a black character into the book we wouldn't sell any copies in the South. That would take care of all the dealers down there and we wouldn't make any money on it. DC got very, very nervous. They decided to scrap the story. This was *after* it was finished. It was a shame because, as I said, it was the best thing Nick Cardy probably ever did. It was a beautiful job.

Neal Adams tried to help us out. He tried to redialogue the story for us over a weekend so it could get saved. Finally, they decided to just scrap it. Neal did an entirely different story from scratch and changed the character—I think Jericho was the character's name—into a white character. They salvaged about two pages of it. So in the course of that story there are two Nick Cardy pages stuck in there—secretly!! Carmine Infantino got very leery of us at that point. We were, actually I guess with the exception of Cary Bates and Roy Thomas, the first newcomers to have come along in about fifteen years. There hadn't been many new people in the business since the early 1950s.

CF: There was Shooter.

LEN: Yeah. I think him and Cary and...who else...Roy. Anyway, at that point they got very leery of what we had been doing and took back some of the work I was already working on. I had gotten assignments for a *TOMAHAWK* story, a *CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN*, and a couple of other things. I had also just revamped *THE METAL MEN*, given them a whole bunch of secret identities, and other things. Carmine took back the pencils on *THE METAL MEN* and had Denny O'Neil redialogue the story sight unseen! Carmine was afraid of everything we had done. Obviously he thought that nothing could be good [that we had done] because we had done one story DC was worried about. Dick Giordano still kept me busy at DC—I'm glad Dick is back at DC, I owe him a great deal—but I went looking for work elsewhere. I went to Gold Key. I wrote a lot of their mystery books—*THE TWILIGHT ZONE, BORIS KARLOFF*...I actually *drew* a story for *GRIMM'S* GHOST *TALES*! I also wrote *STAR TREK* for about two years and *MOD WHEELS*. *MOD WHEELS* is funny because I'd been doing *HOT WHEELS* for Dick at DC. When I went over to Gold Key I had a whole bunch of stories for that book which I had never done, because it had been cancelled. I looked at their *MOD WHEELS* book and, in essence, it was the same cast of characters as in *HOT WHEELS*: the big burly not-too-bright guy, the young leader, and a brainy type. I just added a couple more characters who were also versions of the *HOT WHEELS* cast and did—not the same stories—but all the stories I hadn't gotten a chance to do for *HOT WHEELS*. I kept it going for another two years, I think.

CF: Out of all this freelance work you eventually committed yourself to Marvel.

LEN: Sort of by accident. Little by little the rates would go up, or the companies would fold as Skywald did, until it was not worth my money to stay at Gold Key. I finally quit there—not because I disliked working for them. I actually had a very good time— but because of money. The rates were over twice as much at DC and I just couldn't afford to stay at Gold Key. So I went back to DC full-time, or close to it, in 1971. I took over *THE PHANTOM STRANGER* and a few other things. What got me to Marvel was the fact that I was rooming with Gerry Conway. We shared an apartment.

CF: The connection becomes clearer!

LEN: Right!! We were good friends. We'd spend all hours of the night writing and going out for coffee. We usually ate dinner about 4:00 A.M. We pulled all-nighters together. He was at Marvel. We had a tendency at that point in our careers to sort of switch books. If he went over to Marvel, I'd go over to DC and do a bunch of books he had been writing. I'd replaced him on *THE PHANTOM STRANGER* and a couple of other titles. Then suddenly he'd go over to DC and I'd go over to Marvel and take over whatever books he'd been writing there. We kept doing that for several years. While he was at Marvel I was really interested in several of the books he was doing. I was already working for Marvel since I'd been doing those mysteries and westerns. I mentioned to them that if they were ever interested in my doing *WEREWOLF BY NIGHT* to give me a call. That's what started it. When Gerry gave it up, Roy called me and asked if I was interested in doing it. I was. After four issues I traded it to pick up *MARVEL TEAM-UP* which Gerry was giving up. Again I kept following him. The next thing I knew more and more of my time was being taken up by Marvel. They sort of took me away from DC without my noticing it. Then, when Roy offered me a job as his assistant editor in '73 or '74, I took the job. I went over to Marvel full-time. Two months later I was editor-in-chief.

CF: You'd been working at a number of these various companies up until the time you became editor-in-chief. What type of editorial experience had you been getting that prepared you for

the job? Were you given any editorial training?

LEN: Not specifically. I don't think anyone can say "Today we will teach you to be an editor". It's just a matter of learning and listening. I've always said that I've learned something—different things— from every editor I've worked for, even if it was simply "do nothing this man tells you—it's wrong!" That's still educational. I think I'm probably the last writer in the business to have had that sort of training because, as I've said, I've worked for something like thirteen different editors at one point, sometimes two or three editors at the same company—all of whom wanted something different and to all of whom I tried to give something different. I learned to do what people wanted me to do. I learned to please people like Joe Orlando, Dick Giordano, Julie Schwartz, and Roy. They all taught me a great deal just by my working with them.

CF: When you became Roy's assistant, what actually were you doing?

LEN: Well, I think when he hired me that he knew he was leaving soon. He quit just a month or two later. He obviously had it in mind. So I was just his back-up man. He said, when he hired me initially, that I was the only other person besides him he knew of who knew everything about the books—all filed away mentally. It made it easy to work on the books, and it made sure that Dr. Doom wasn't called Fred in any given month. He had me doing that—checking facts. He made me do house ads for the company. He taught me how to write cover copy, things like that. Cover copy was my favorite part—it still is! I love covers. I have a great time doing them.

Roy taught me pretty much how to *do* things. He didn't teach me how to organize because I'm not really a businessman-type organizer. I'm really just interested in the creative aspect of things, so I'm not all that great at running something. That is why I think I left the job after about eight months. I found myself getting involved more with the business aspects of the job than with the creative. I spent all my time up on the ninth floor fighting with the accountants about getting people more money, or not cancelling this book, or giving us more pages...The comics books were going on by themselves. I didn't have the time to devote myself to them.

CF: Who was editing the editorial contents at that point, then?

LEN: Well, I oversaw things. I think the difference between Marvel and DC is that, at least back then (I don't know if it's the same now. I don't really think it is), at DC the editor is *in charge*. I am in charge of every aspect of my books there. I see everything at every stage. I change things constantly and I have to approve everything. At Marvel, editing was mostly picking the right people to do the books—and there were some great people working for Marvel back then—and giving them a free hand. If they made mistakes, you'd just tell them "don't ever do that again." But it was a case of catching things after the fact, after they'd been printed.

CF: I understand there were instances in which serious questions were raised over the content of certain stories but nothing could be done about them, as they'd already been printed.

LEN: That happened only occasionally. It was a very good staff, probably one of the best that the business has ever seen. Some brilliant writing and some incredible artwork was produced then. I think the industry overall has probably gone down since then. It was a high point, creatively speaking, of comics.

CF: We're talking about Marvel during '72 to about '76?

LEN: Yeah, just about. People like Wrightson and Barry Smith and others who aren't in comics anymore. No one's come along who is as good as they were.

CF: You've worked under so many editors and you mentioned that you learned to give each one what he wanted. How would you contrast the differences in your books based on the editors they were under? What were your stories like under, say, Roy Thomas?

LEN: Look, the Marvel stuff is harder to define than the DC material because again it was free rein. Roy hired me because he thought I knew what was right for a Marvel comic. I tried to write them the Marvel way. I felt an obligation to keep them familiar. They were successful, they obviously had a formula of sorts that worked. If I wrote *SPIDER-MAN*, I tried to make it sound like Stan's *SPIDER-MAN*. He had carved such a solid image for all his books, everything was so meticulously defined, that I felt if you started to vary from that image, the books would start to fall apart. They really wouldn't sound like those books any more. Roy and I were limited simply by what we were following.

CF: Was that an aesthetic judgement on your parts, or was it the company line? Was it backed up commercially? Have there ever been examples of one of the big books deviating substantially from what their editorial thrust had been and selling more poorly?

LEN: At Marvel I don't think that was necessarily true back then. I can't think of anything...the books did well. *SPIDER-MAN*, the *FF*—there was no reason to change them. I felt that as a fan I was limiting myself to what I had read for a hundred issues. I just didn't want the *FF* to not be what they had been. It *was* an aesthetic judgement, but I never took it as "This is the way the book has to be done in order to sell it!"

I was intimidated, frankly, when I first got the *SPIDER-MAN* books. It's the one thing that I just don't understand about how Marvel now assigns *SPIDER-MAN* as a training ground. They break in new writers on it and I find that the character is now starting to suffer from it. He's getting washed-out. Back then, *SPIDER-MAN* was what you strove to attain. You were told, "Someday you'll be able to write *SPIDER-MAN*—you'll be *good enough*."

CF: If it is the case, then Marvel's current line sounds almost like: "Well, you can't hurt *SPIDER-MAN*'s sales substantially, so why not put the people who are *known* to boost sales on books that need them?"

LEN: I think that's part of it. Theory nowadays is that you just can't hurt *SPIDER-MAN*. Although I've heard tell that they're finding out that that's wrong, that certain books in the *SPIDER-MAN* line are not doing as well because the books are not well-done. I may be wrong, I don't have the sales figures, but

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Wein claims he felt intimidated by writing the top-line Marvel books. By his own design, his later *SPIDER-MAN* issues borrowed heavily from the plotting style of the seminal Ditko issues of the series.

I've been told that by several people.

CF: What could you do with a "status quo" book like *SPIDER-MAN*—that is, with a book whose feature character is so marketable that there is nothing you can do to fundamentally change him? As a writer, how did you approach that sort of situation?

LEN: Cautiously. Again, that was part of the problem I felt I had with *SPIDER-MAN* and the *FANTASTIC FOUR*. Stan, years ago, ran into exactly the same problem. I think it's more noticeable, or was, at Marvel where change had always been a way of life. At DC the books went along and nobody noticed any changes because there so rarely were any changes. The problem at Marvel was that we suddenly became a business with a bunch of books that Stan, I don't think ever in his heart expected to last more than a couple of years. The books became huge successes. If he had known that the *FF* would be around today he never would have put Reed Richards and Ben Grimm back in WW II. It dates them. Now we have a bunch of sixty-five-year-old super-heroes running around. He didn't expect these things to become successful—not really. I don't think anybody did, and when they started to—but when they started to become marketable and there was merchandising coming—he found himself with a problem. He couldn't go in and sell a *SPIDER-MAN* TV show with Peter Parker and Gwen Stacy because that week Gwen had been hit by a truck. His girl friend was actually Mary Jane. Someone would pick up the book and say, "This isn't what Stan told me it was. There's no resemblance." And that's why in fact there was the return of the Gwen Stacy Clone. Stan was trying to sell a TV series and the book wasn't familiar to him. As he got out of the books, he left being editor-in-chief and became publisher, he only had a passing familiarity with may of the books and remembered them as they were when he had been doing them. And much of it had changed. He called a meeting once and said, "We mustn't change things anymore" because it was impossible to sell anything by the time it came out. What he wanted was the illusion of change. Where things would seem to change but thing would really just stay the same. And that's part of the problem—so many people make fun of Robin's costume. We

Why is this 19-year-old running around in green, scaled jockey shorts? Why to make money for his bosses, of course.

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can't change Robin's costume. There are millions and millions of dollars of merchandising tied up in that stupid suit. The nineteen-year-old kid running around with the bare hairy legs and we're stuck with it because of financial considerations that go beyond the books—and frankly, which make us the money we need to keep the books going. We have to make concessions. It's difficult. When I was doing the *FF*, I broke them up at the end. I had not planned that to be my last issue, I was going to go on with it. Marv did that. Everyone who thought that Marv was making brilliant changes in *SPIDER-MAN*—when he killed Aunt May and had Peter go work for the Globe—was all an illusion. He left the book before he could tie everything up but it was designed to be a circle. The end result would have had Aunt May back, and Peter back working for Jameson, and all the rest of it. It was only the illusion of change. It *seemed* to move around. It's something that stifles the books to some degree, but is necessary if we're going to keep them in existence. We make a lot more money off the merchandising than we do off the books we sell. And that's what subsidizes us doing the books.

CF: Let's go back to the differences between editors. How would you define the editorial style of Julius Schwartz?

LEN: Julie loves plotting. We'd sit down and hash out the plot together. He'd make changes and I'd make changes.

CF: Julie did that with you, too?

LEN: Always, although it reached a point towards the end, expecially with the *JUSTICE LEAGUE*, where I was doing more on my own than he usually allows. The *JUSTICE LEAGUE* was selling well and I was having fun with it. I was doing things that hadn't been done before. I added some new characters and tried to change the book around. That was one of my great success stories. I'm very proud of it. The book was almost on the verge of cancellation when I took it over. Within two years it went from the verge of cancellation to becoming a monthly for the first time in its career and one of DC's top sellers. It's been there ever since.

I got along very well with Julie. I love working for him—I always have. He inspires me, he brings things out in me that other people can't.

CF: As regards Julie's methods, Roy Thomas was quoted in last month's *PREVUE* as having said, "The editor/writer system seems to break down the magic. Too much editorial input can kill a book." I remember that statement as being in direct reference to the "Julie Schwartz style" of editing. Would you agree with Roy on this?

LEN: No, not at all. Julie Schwartz has been doing comics for thirty-five years. That is *my* lifetime—that's *longer* than my lifetime! He knows what he's doing. People like him have earned the right to do whatever they want to anything I write *and* anything anyone else writes. I learned a great deal from Julie Schwartz. He taught me the job. I think the problem that Roy has is that he never had someone standing over him (except during the early days of his career when Stan probably did), monitoring his work. Not that he does anything poorly—God, no!—if you can trust anyone to run off on his own and do what he wants with a book it's Roy Thomas. I think it's more Roy being a little leery of what Julie *might* do than of anything Julie actually would do. Julie knows when to leave people alone. As I said, towards the end of my first run with him, I could just say the villain for next month will be Luthor and Julie would say fine. He started to not let me tell him the plots. He'd say, "No, let me read it and be surprised."

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Wein's *JLA*s were his big success story. He was doing so well with the book, Julie Schwartz delegated him unprecedented freedom with it.

CF: That's a real sign of confidence.

LEN: I was always very flattered by that.

CF: So now *you're* the editor of some of Julie's old books.

• •

CF: We heard reports that at some convention panel you were asking the audience if they had *any* suggestions for what to do with *WONDER WOMAN*—any at all! Really, are things *that* bad with the book?

LEN: They were. Actually, at the moment, sales are going up. The new "return to the past" that I'm doing with Gerry seems to

The *WONDER WOMAN* series requires such special handling that it often seems more of a millstone on the DC line than an asset. Current issues, though, seem to have clicked with the buying public.

be more successful. The first issue of that jumped up five or six points. It seems to be going up even more from there. I think the book had lost its focus again, it was going through writers who didn't know what to do with it. The astronaut business and everything else she was doing—I could never understand the concept of a woman who goes across the galaxy with the JLA interested in being an astronaut. Where's the thrill? You've been to Mars, you've been to Rann, you've been everywhere. It never made any sense. Gerry and I sat down and talked about the whole thing. He was the one who wanted to go back to what the book had once been He's very strong about it and he's trying very hard to make it successful. Obviously, he's succeeding. I'm very pleased.

I've never understood the many times a new editor takes over a book and changes it simply because, "Well, we've been doing all this and it's old hat." It seems almost without exception everytime a new editor has taken over a book and started to make changes, it's been detrimental to the book. Sales go down. I mean, there are a lot of reasons why the sales have dwindled over the past fifteen years, buy you can go back and almost mark "here's where it changed and here's where the sales dropped" in almost every case. It's just changing for the sake of changing. Someone coming in and saying, "I'm going to make my imprint on this book. It will look the way I want it to look." I don't think this is necessarily commercial or even creatively viable. It's more of a case of—proving you can change things if you want to.

CF: That would exclude any changes made for the purpose of boosting sagging sales, say, like the Iris Allen business (in *THE FLASH*)?

LEN: That was something I had nothing to do with except that I had to tie up some loose threads at the very end. Although, again, that was a book that was doing very poorly and it has moved to the top of the line since that [storyline] started. It's been there ever since. It had gotten complacent—that was a book that *did* need shaking up. I mean, *THE FLASH* was a book that I used to enjoy both reading and writing, and the last five years before Ross took it over, it would put me to *sleep* when I read it! (Sorry, Julie, it's true!!) Everything was happy, everything was nice. There was nothing anyone cared about.

CF: People don't care about happiness and niceness?

LEN: Nooo!!! People want melodrama. That's what we're selling, basically.

CF: Why do you think comics have to be melodrama?

LEN: I don't know if they have to be melodrama. Certainly there are different types of comics. I think we're selling the modern fairy tale, the great American myth, those sort of things are almost always melodramatic—almost by definition. Comic books are escapist entertainment. They are less so now, perhaps, but still the most successful books are the ones most fantasy-oriented—*enjoyable comic books!* Depressing comic books just don't seem to sell. I don't think people want to turn from inflation and the crisis in Iran to find everything dreadful in comics as well. They're a medium that most people read and fold up and put in their back pockets or throw away when they're done. It serves as a point of definition, being melodramatic. The books are clear, the characters are stereotypical *only* in terms of defining them quickly.

If they're well-done, they transcend sheer stereotyping and become three-dimensional characters. But familiar accent, familiar this, is quick reference for the reader's mind as to what this character is like. It's quick identification. You know what you're reading and can go on from there.

CF: Like you and Cockrum did with the *NEW X-MEN*.

LEN: Exactly, everyone from different countries, with different accents, and it established them immediately. It seems to have worked since the book is doing very well. It's a hell of a book.

CF: That's one way of putting it. Pretty much we've talked about just the editorial aspect of you job and I've been wondering, as an editor, what do you look for in a book: a dollop of melodrama, identifiable characters? Are you looking for anything else?

LEN: Yes, what I tell every writer who works for me: humanity. I

am generally a very optimistic person and I like optimistic stories—or at least stories that touch you. Take some of the mystery stories that have downer endings, for instance— at least you've gotten involved with the characters. That's all I ask for: a story that involves you. If you care about the characters, any story is important. If you don't care about the characters, no matter how brilliant your story is, it doesn't count for anything—no one cares. No one's gotten involved. That's what I ask from every writer: I want people, three-dimensional characters and humanity in the work. That's basically it, I think.

If I have an editorial view, it's man's basic humanity. I think people are good on the bottom. I think when you get down to it, there is compassion and I try to put that into my stories. And in the stories I buy from other writers.

CF: So that's what you're looking for when you're working with a writer on a story or when you buy a story. Do you think that you get that communication of compassion and humanity, goodness, almost a positive feel to the story, through the characterization, or do you also look for plots such that that aspect of the characterization can be highlighted? In other words, is having these humanistic, positive characters sufficient to communicate your position or are you concerned with having plots which emphasize it?

LEN: If you're doing it right they are almost synonomous. The plots will come out of the characters and the characters—if I have caught that particular viewpoint of humanism and compassion—those characters will write stories that will almost force you to focus on those things. Simply by their own natures. I've written stories myself over the years which haven't ended the way I started them out to end. The characters took over and changed the ending. *THE PHANTOM STRANGER* often was like that. I remember one story which had a happy ending and it wasn't supposed to. I was in control up until about three pages from the end, and then the characters took over and just wouldn't let me end it the way I had planned.

CF: When you're working with a writer or an artist, since at DC you're responsible for both sides, how do you communicate your editorial vision to the staff?

LEN: I think I've always been a very instinctual writer and editor. I am hard-pressed on occasion to explain why something is right or wrong. I just know it is, feel it is. If I communicate with my people it's on a level beyond specifics: this is a bad caption, this is a good face. It's more trying to develop enthusiasm. The thing I've worked hardest for in my year at DC is to instill a sense of enthusiasm in the people I work with, If they get as excited about the projects as I do, the reader will. I seem to be accomplishing that in places and I'm very proud of that.

CF: Obviously the artist and writer bring their own viewpoints into the books, too. Suppose that you are working with a creative team that is not particularly positive or humanistically oriented? What would you do in that case?

LEN: So far it hasn't happened, so it's hard to say. I think most of the people in this business are positive people. Fantasy as a way of life must do something to your outlook. Most of the people I've worked with—I can't think of a single exception off the top of my head—are positive people.

CF: Slightly disassociated question: *MYSTERY IN SPACE* is more in the process of evolving into something...?

LEN: It is.

CF:... What with the *TIME WARP* overflow and such. Are you attempting to pursue in that book anything akin to the educational tone of its predecessors *STRANGE ADVENTURES* and the original *MIS?*

LEN: Yes! I've got several stories in that vein. Gerry Conway just wrote a story that Mike Zeck illustrated called *"Trouble With Air"*, which is basically just a day in the life of surviving on the planet Pluto. That's what it's all about and it's full of information. I learned more about Pluto in the first few pages of that script than I ever knew and possibly ever cared to know. It was wonderful. We're trying all sorts of different stories: whimsy, hard science stories, stories without villains at all, no alien invasions, just coping with circumstances—people stories. There is a more positive viewpoint to the book starting with the fifth issue and taking over by about the seventh issue, because half of the fifth and pieces of the sixth just about finishes my

MYSTERY IN SPACE, claims Wein, is a favorite book among professionals because it offers them a welcome alternative to super-hero work. It's too early to tell if the fans will feel the same way.

TIME WARP inventory. Bruce Jones is doing stories for me, Gerry Conway, Mike Barr—a lot of good people doing very good work—artists, too. I've got Garcia-Lopez working on a story right now, Gray Morrow, Tom Sutton, Tom Yates, lots of people. Carmine Infantino is doing a new Space Museum story, and asked if he could do any others in the series that might be written. *Him* asking *me* that?

CF: How about getting him to ink it, too?

LEN: If he wants to, it's his! So, I've got quite a lot of talented people lined up...

CF: Dan Spiegle?

LEN: Yeah, I just gave him another story, in fact. George Tuska will be doing some interior work for the first time in years—he's done two or three stories. Jose Delbo just did one, he pencilled and inked it himself, which is the first time he's done both pencils and inks for us in years. All sorts of different people. I'm getting the best I can steal from anywhere. And a lot of people are excited about the book and want to work for it.

CF: Do you think that's because it's an sf book during a time when people are a lot more fired-up about sf as a mass-market product?

LEN: I think that the book is there because of that—in terms of corporate thinking. We all want sf to succeed, otherwise we'd have just buried the *TIME WARP* inventory and not bothered to put the book out. I think when we first conceived it, *MIS* was just a stop-gap measure—there until something regular could be put on the schedule. But I'm so enthusiastic about the project and so are some of the other people that we've got until it sells or doesn't. Initial sales put it equal with the line—it's not doing better and it's not doing worse, which is at least something. We'll see how it develops. I think that if the book can last long enough to get to the material that I've been buying, it will pick up. It's a good book. It's a book I'm really proud of. Obviously the company thinks highly enough of it to see if it succeeds or not. I think the people are working on the book *not* because it's sf, but because it's a chance to write and draw something different. All the writers and all the artists get tired of doing nothing but all the superhero material. This is a chance for some variety. Mike Zeck was really pleased with his story—had a great time with it and asked to do more. And a lot of people feel the same way.

CF: There are actually several classic comic book genres that are presently unrepresented or close to it. There are a very small number of westerns coming out these days.

LEN: I know.

CF: None of them are following the classic American western tradition, either. They're all spaghetti pastiches.

LEN: I would love to see a new, positive western. You know, I almost did one. What the fan press had been calling *"Dakota"* was going to be a white-hat western. I was going to edit the book, Gerry Conway was going to write it. Then we had some juggling and Marv and I ended up doing *THE NEW TEEN TITANS* instead.

CF: So *"Dakota"* is temporarily shelved, then?

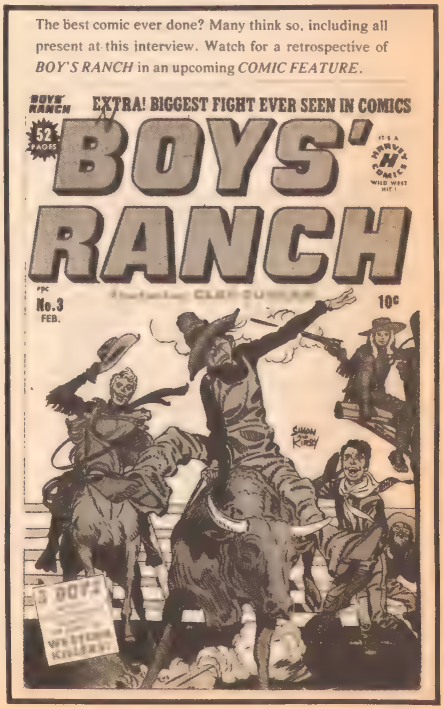
LEN: Yeah. I wanted to try a good-guy western. The hero was going to be a marshal and wear a badge and a white hat and be a *positive* character. I don't think *JONAH HEX* is the only way to go with westerns.

CF: I hope not. Have you ever read Simon and Kirby's *BOY'S RANCH?*

LEN: I have a complete set, bound. *"Mother Delilah"* (*BOY'S RANCH* #3) might be the best comic book story ever done.

CF: We agree (*CF reporters shake Wein's hand.*) Now paralleling that question—about forgotten comic genres done particularly well by Simon and Kirby—how about love comics? There are no love comics anymore. Do you think there's room for them? Does anyone at DC? Were they shut down because there was no editorial interest in them or because there's no market?

LEN: Not because there's no interest. Again people like John Buscema, when Marvel was still doing them—that was his favorite stuff. He was having a wonderful time. So was John Romita. It's not that there isn't an interest in the business. I think the market has dwindled. The kind of audience that used to read the romance comic have found television. They don't read romance comics anymore, because they have *LOVE OF LIFE*,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THE EDGE OF NIGHT, or a lot of that. The market had started to price itself out beyond what the audience was willing to spend for it. Also at the time the books started to dwindle they had been written and drawn by many of the same people for years. I think they were losing touch with what the audience was reading, what the audience was interested in. They were still doing stories about what love was like during 1947 for an audience reading it during 1967. Love is probably the same but a lot of the nuance has changed and I think that was a problem, part of why the books died.

CF: It seemed to me that the reason the books went out wasn't just that the nuance didn't change but that they blanderized themselves to the point that they were writing about love in a vacuum, the love problems of people who had no background or motivations. Instead of trying to establish a setting and background and building up the characterizations and then introducing the conflict, the way the older stories did. Actually, a lot of the older love comics read like very good "B" movies, while for the last six or seven years before *YOUNG ROMANCE* folded, the stories were more like poor soap operas. There is a big difference—hardly a basis for comparison.

LEN: I agree with you completely. I would like to see the love comics back. I think they're needed. I'd also like to see bigfoot comics again—funny animals. I think we're narrowing our range and the problem is that, near as I can tell, it's just going to get worse. In that respect, I don't think it's likely that comics are going to broaden the topics they cover and get back to romance or western. The market is changing. We're getting to where the direct sales shops are finally reaching the point where they are starting to have a viable commercial effect. Paul Levitz feels that within five years, the shops will start dictating the types of books we publish, because that's where the market will be. That market seems to be interested almost exclusively in superheroes.

CF: Don't you think that might be because that's just about all that's been produced?

LEN: I dont think so. We've tried different things over the years. Putting out different types of books. Whether they were well done is a different conversation altogether, but they didn't seem to sell.

CF: At DC, say you wanted to create a bigfoot comic or a love comic, could an editor suggest such a book and fight it through?

LEN: Absolutely. If there were enough people thinking that you could do it well enough to succeed. As I said about the *NEW TEEN TITANS*, they didn't want to do the book. I was scheduled to do the new western, Marv was going to be doing a mystery-oriented character for Ross Andru—not Dracula, but in that mood, like the Phantom Stranger—and we got into a discussion. We had wanted to do *THE TITANS*. We just had an affinity for it and had talked about reviving it. It was a book we had always enjoyed and was a book that had been done perfectly miserably in its past several incarnations, *and* they had spoken of reviving it before they decided to create these other two books. Marv and I went in to see Jenette. We said, "How come we are doing these? Why were these settled on instead of the *TITANS* like we had discussed?" And she said, "Well, we thought you people would do these books well and the *TITANS* was an embarassment. It was just a bad book." The last time it was cancelled it was selling very well but they were so embarassed by its creative quality that they cancelled it. It's one of the few instances in comics history that a book was cancelled sheerly on the basis of aesthetic reasons. They were just too embarassed to put it out every month.

So we went in and said we'd like to do it and Jenette said, "No, I don't like the book—the last several versions were embarassing." And we said that we'd do one that she'd like. And we just started talking about it and we were so enthusiastic that she said, "Anything you're so enthusiastic about, go! Go do the book!" And we did. And it's selling like a son-of-a-gun, so it worked. Again, the enthusiasm is contagious. The readers can sense that everyone involved is really having a great time and working as hard as he can.

CF: Is *THE TITANS* a good example of the positive humanistic feel you're trying to inject into your books?

LEN: I guess so, maybe. There are ups and downs, but there certainly is humanity to the characters. It's not the old book at

The old *TEEN TITANS* was cancelled because it was "an embarassment", but the revival is attributable to Wein's and Wolfman's enthusiasm for the concept.

How to raise sales on a book: Kill the hero's wife? Well, not always, but it worked for *THE FLASH*. Some of the best Don Heck art in fifteen years didn't hurt either.

all. The best example of my editorial thrust will be *MIS* where we're just doing character studies. There isn't the series of continuing characters to camouflage the personality of any given character. You get involved with super-heroes by looking at the costumes and getting involved with the action—there is a tendency to not notice who the people are. You think of what they are, not who they are. *MIS* avoids that by being an anthology.

CF: Do you think the super-hero books should learn not to camouflage the personalities involved?

LEN: I don't think that it's a problem. They're doing well commercially so they must be giving the market what it wants.

CF: Or at least the market that still buys them.

LEN: That's part of the problem. Television—were it not for television, we'd still be doing as well. Much of what is done in comics—it's easier for someone to sit down and turn on the tube and turn off their brain than it is to actually seek out and read something. You've got a population where only 1% reads more than one book a year. That's frightening. It has fallen that far. And most of that 1% just reads whatever this year's bestseller is.

CF: Comic books, whatever else can be said about them, then, at least keeps the reading public reading.

LEN: And helps educate them!! I've always been very proud of the things that I first learned through reading comics. Back in junior high, I was the only person in my class who knew that the closest star to Sol was Alpha Centauri--actually Beta Centauri, but don't tell Julie—and how far away it was. I learned all that from "*Adam Strange*". I learned about metals from *THE METAL MEN*.

CF: Do you think that it's still going on?

LEN: More and more of it, yes. I think we're getting back to it. Again there are stories in *MIS* that are chock-full of educational information.

CF: That will be nice to see. Judging from my own comic reading, it seems that very little of the old educational substance that was such a standby in '60s comics, especially DC comics, has been carried over into the later '70s emphasis on flash and melodrama. They dropped all those factual science pages...

LEN: The "*Flash Facts*"...I used to love all that.

CF: All of the writers who were known for creating those types of comics are no longer working for the industry, except Bob Kanigher, perhaps—and that quality is evident in Cary Bates' work, but other than that I'd be hard pressed to think of examples of people who strive to inject educational content into their comics. Maybe Archie [Goodwin]. Do You think that it's to the detriment of comics either as an entertainment or communication medium that this aspect of their 1960s development has seemingly vanished?

LEN: I don't think it detracts from comics as an entertainment medium. Entertainment does not need to be educational. Certainly it's nice if it manages to do both. We're trying more of that. Marv Wolfman has just done a four-part *BATMAN* story over which he's exhausted encyclopedias. It's an across-the-world chase between Batman and Ras-al-Ghul and Marv went out of his way to research it, to stuff it with information. It's a travelogue of the world. There's information about everywhere they go and there are things to learn that hopefully you didn't already know. He's working very hard at that—a lot of people are. I think those of us who remember those books have started to miss that educational quality and we're trying to put it back in where we can.

CF: Have you thought of asking Gardner Fox to come back?

LEN: There are a lot of reasons why we couldn't do that. Also, I think he'd look like an anachronism. His style wouldn't work today. Writers like Fox were doing two-dimensional characters. The books we all grew up loving really didn't have what Marvel comics added to comics in the early-and-mid-Sixties. Those old stories were two-dimensional cardboard figures moving through intricate plots. You could transfer any character to any other and you would not notice any difference.

CF: I've heard the 1960s *JLA*s described as "watching someone else solve a puzzle."

LEN: It's very much that sort of thing. Even then, if you didn't have the characters call each other by name, you wouldn't know who any of them were. There were seven or eight characters who all sounded exactly alike. That was one of the things I tried to add to the book when I took over, like the fighting between Green Arrow and Hawkman. I couldn't believe that all these people could hang out and have a wonderful time together. Somebody would have to get on someone else's nerves.

CF: . . I can remember when instances of characterization in those stories (1960s) happened, they were so memorable—not so much by expertise, but by rarity—that they really stuck with you. I remember a *JLA* from long, long ago, in which the atmosphere of an alien world was such that if somebody told you you couldn't do something than you couldn't. The JLA tried to escape from a cage in which they were imprisoned, after being told that not even Superman could bend the bars. Superman tried and failed. J'onn J'onzz stepped up to try and Superman told him that if he, Superman, couldn't bend the bars, then J'onn J'onzz couldn't either—and sure enough, he couldn't. Eventually they got out, defeated the super-menace, guessed what the atmosphere's secret was, and eliminated it's subliminal compulsion properties. Then, before they left that other world, Superman went back and bent the bars of that cage, just to prove he could.

LEN: That sounds like something Julie would add to a story. I wouldn't stake my life on it, but I'd come close to it. I know the way he thinks.

CF: It seems that what passes for characterization now has taken over to such an extent that the memorable scences like that—the ones that stick to you and fundamentally color your perception of the character—are just as rare as before if not more so.

LEN: They're not memorable any more because they're not rare anymore. That character bit has become commonplace.

CF: So now the rare memorable element is the educational content?

LEN: Sometime we'll discover a happy medium that accomplishes both the ecucation and the characterization.

CF: I can think of books that have managed it. Say, *DOCTOR STRANGE* under Englehart—that was legitimate mysticism and strong characterization. So it has been done in isolated examples here and there. In some cases they have been done convincingly and successfully, even in terms of commercial sales. Why haven't they been done more frequently? Is it because of what the market demands in terms of sales returns or is it editorial predisposition?

LEN: I don't think it's either. I think it's a matter of talent. The volume of the books not done well are done that way because the people producing the books can't do them well. There are a lot of people who just shouldn't be in the business, who just aren't as talented. That's not a crime. Talent is a limited commodity and there are only a limited number of people who are as good as they are. There have to be levels. If everyone was as good as everyone else, you wouldn't have a thing called talent. You wouldn't be able to say, "This is good! This person has done this well!" because everyone would be able to do it just as well.

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The "memorable" comic in question. Anybody remember it?

That's the problem: We have more books than we have people wholly qualified to produce them—I think, anyway.

CF: Is that more of a problem of talent or training?

LEN: A combination of both. I think you have to have the talent before training will accomplish anything. There are a lot of of people who are logical and methodical and can take a story apart and dissect it and learn the structure. That sort of thing is easy to learn. You read enough comic books and you know it. You know that this type of dialogue works here, this type of interaction there, a spot of action, and program it into a computer, and it will give you an adequate comic story. But it would never be memorable. You would forget it the minute you were finished with it, but you wouldn't put it down while you were reading it. Those who transcend the pattern, those who go above and produce Art are few and far between, unfortunately. Partly because they think there's not enough money in this business—but that's not really true. People who earn their living here can earn a comfortable living. If they do it well and do it regularity. People who want it to be more because they feel it ought to be more for their own sakes don't do well and don't stick with it. And that's a shame. We've lost a lot of people that way,

people like Wrightson, Barry Windsor-Smith, and others who've gone the way. They do whatever they do and I suppose they live comfortably on it and are happy with it, but the bulk of their work has been lost to the audience that it ought to have. It's a shame.

CF: Or the number of comics professionals who have moved into animation over the last seven or eight years...

LEN: There is a lot of that. If too many people move to California, it will sink into the sea that much sooner.

CF: You used to be a writer and now you're an editor. Do you miss writing?

LEN: I haven't given it up completely. I just this weekend finished plotting the *BATMAN/HULK* DC/Marvel Crossover.

CF: Is that going to be anything like *GODZILLA MEETS BAMBI?*

LEN: Not at all. So far it's working. Garcia-Lopez is going to do the art—at least I certainly hope so. So it should look nice.

So I do write—I'm a writer first and foremost, but I get a great deal of creative satisfaction out of editing the books. When I put together a good issue of something it's like having fathered a child! Damn, all that *worked!!* Look at that! It's *mine!!* Because you do follow and control every step of the process at DC unlike Marvel. I sit there and I plot the stories with the writers, I edit the scripts when they come in, I go over the pencils with the penciller—and have him make corrections if necessary, I check the lettering when it comes back, and I check the inking when it comes back—and make corrections when necessary. And the coloring and the covers and the cover copy—all of that. There is not a step in the process where I do not follow until it hits the newsstand. When it works, it's mine, and when it fails, it's mine. I take responsibility either way. It's not as if I didn't see it, or didn't notice it. If I make a mistake or a proofreading error makes it through, it's my fault. I proofread the books, too. It's really an editor's book at DC unlike Marvel. There the editors are more traffic controllers than anything else. Editing gives me a great deal of creative satisfaction, but i still want to write. I'm still a writer first and foremost.

CF: Why did you agree to take an editorial position, then?

LEN: The challenge. I was working at DC and was unhappy with a lot of the books. I was always throwing my two cents in: If I were doing this I'd have fixed this, why don't you go to production and tell them to do that, why not this or the other thing. I did that long enough and they finally said put your money where your mouth is—here, do it!

CF: Couldn't back down *then*.

LEN: No, and I was interested in having the chance to edit, to improve things. Hopefully, I have. I made some adjustments even in some minor little things in production and I just kept pushing until I got them because they seemed to make sense. So hopefully I contributed something. I like doing the books, too. I really do have a great sense of accomplishment from the books that work—and even when they don't.

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Fandom Zone

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by Bob Jennings

Welcome to another installment of RIDE THE TIGER. In case you are not familiar with us yet, this is a fanzine review column. Fanzines will be covered in grade school fashion, ranging from F, the worst, up to A, the best. Plus and minus marks may be added for your further confusion as we go along.

Please keep in mind some of my regular prejudices in order to make adjustments in case your biases do not agree with my own. I'm not at all fond of interviews, pin-up art pages, fan fiction, or amateur comic strips. I also enjoy articles that are well-researched and well-written.

Fanzine editors who would like to see their publications reviewed should send copies to me. Generous bribes and gifts are optional...

Bob Jennings
RFD 2, Whiting Road
Dudley, MA 01570

THE ARTIST'S SHOWCASE #4, $1.00, 88 Many Levels Road., White Bear Lake, Minn. 55110, 8½ x 11", 20 pages, photo-offset, irregular schedule.

This is one of a new breed of fanzines, devoted to developing artist talent in fandom rather than talking about pro comics and the field of comic books specifically. The publication offers a showcase for a wide variety of young talent in specially-directed full-page illustrations. Readers are invited to make detailed comments on the artwork, and an art panel votes on the full-page material in each issue.

The idea sounds good. Amateur artists get a chance to show off their material and receive some constructive criticism for their efforts. Unfortunately the idea runs into some problems along the way. The chief problem is that most of the amatuer artists who inhabit these pages have major artistic faults which hit-and-miss criticism is not going to help. It is one thing to point out to an artist that his human anatomy is all wrong, that he is drawing his people like stretched-out rubber bands. It is quite another to assume that the artist has the technical expertise to correct the problem. Most fan artists do not. They need instruction, either personal art instruction, or the type of material clearly and carefully developed in expensive art course books to show them *how* to correct their artistic faults.

The round of full-page drawings presented this issue pretty well tells the tale. There are eight full-page illos showcased, counting the cover, and the overwhelming majority should never have been printed at all. It's not that the artists are inexperienced or unsure of themselves, it's mostly that these artists are *awful*.

An almost total lack of knowledge about human anatomy, along with an inability to separate background from foreground to focus reader eye attention are the two most prominent flaws in the artwork, but there are plenty of other things to find fault with as well. According to one pro I correspond with, only two fan artists out of a thousand ever go on to make a career in the art field. One glance at the material offered in this issue should tell you why.

The spot illos are somewhat stronger. There is very little written material to balance out the twenty-page issue. There are a few pages of letters, two pages for the art panel to cast their votes and tell why they liked what they did, a few odd bits of comentary here and there, and then there is a two-page interview with a fan artist that contains every flaw and mistake found in every fan interview, from pointless redundant questions to spotty follow-up. Eminently forgettable. The interview didn't even use art from the fan artist being interviewed.

The editors seem to be trying hard here, but they are missing the mark by a wide margin. They complain about the page count restrictions and the fact that they have had to raise the cover price to a dollar this issue, yet they ignore ways in which they could save money or space. For example, what few pages of printed matter are offered here run in full-size unreduced typeface. By photo-reducing the type pages they could get the same amount of wordage in half the page, and then they could either devote that extra space to more illustrations, or cut back and hold their old cover price. There are many filler items that serve no purpose at all, and some pages are literally bludgeoned by the

assortment of trivial spot illustrations where serious page balance would have meant not only a more attractive format, but a considerable savings of space.

The publication as a whole is self-limited by the boundaries it has established for itself. A fanzine devoted to critique and development of fan art may be of interest, but the editors have failed to fully tap the potential of their idea. At $1.00 a copy, this issue is badly overpriced. Better quality art, better layout, more attention to details, a general more professional attitude toward the running of the entire fanzine would generally help. This may be of interest to fans who are heavily into artwork or to fan artists who might want to try their luck here, but otherwise I suggest you pass it by until there is some positive improvement.

RATING: D

MINDROT #18, *David Mruz, 3112 Holmes Ave., South Minneapolis, Minn.* 55408, 5½ x 8½", 32 *pages, photo-offset, reduced type, quarterly.*

MINDROT is a quarterly fanzine devoted to animated films. There are only a few fanzines devoted to animation in any form. In fact, besides MINDROT, the only other one I can think of is FUNNYWORLD, which appears on a highly irregular schedule, perhaps once a year or less.

MINDROT on the other hand sticks pretty closely to its quarterly schedule. It covers the animated film scene past and present in a friendly, chatty manner. This issue opens with an informative letters section and moves on to Jim Korkis' column covering interesting events in the animation field both past and present. Michael Dobbs provides "Koko Comments", another column of commentary and opinion which is basically related to the Fleischer studios and their various creations. Both columns are competent and enjoyable reading.

The bulk of this issue is devoted to a detailed study of the animation work of Osamu Tezuka, a Japanese doctor who gave up his medical career to create cartoon-style comic books beginning in the early fifties, and then graduated to animation in the early sixties.

The lead article is part of a comprehensive history of Tezuka's work, turned in by Jerry Beck, Fred Patten, and Will Timbes Friedwald. They look at the entire spectrum of Tezuka's work, including his early animation creations, but with special emphasis on *MIGHTY ATOM*, his first really big success. *MIGHTY ATOM* is a robot boy with super powers who works with humanity and develops his own personality. Tezuka originated him for his line of comic books, and then adapted the comic book stories to the animated format, and continued to expand the scope of the series when he ran out of comic book material.

The article also deals in some detail with the *JUNGLE EMPEROR* series, which was an animal epic of a lion's efforts to forge civilization from different species in the jungle. This storyline had quite a few more complexities and pathos than most small children watching TV cartoons care to worry about. However, as the writers point out, it was a successful series and was especially popular with adult viewers.

This entire writeup is extremely detailed and well-written. Information, background development, commentary, and opinion are all balanced so that the reader is absorbing a wealth of information in a highly entertaining form. These three fans deserve special merit for turning in such a careful bit of writing workmanship. The article is also profusely illustrated, including breakout sheets, sketch backgrounds, and important historic illustrations of major characters. Superlative is the only work I can think of that adequately describes this entire piece of work.

This lead item is followed immediately by Will Timbes Friedwald's examination of Tezuka's most recent work; a full-length feature release titled *PHOENIX* 2772. This article is also well-written and well-illustrated, but it left me slightly dissatisfied because the writer fails to draw specific conclusions or reasonably explain why he is so fascinated and stunned by this film. Tighter editing or a little more wordage here might have helped.

The issue also comes complete with a historic index and log breakdown of the Tezuka films, including the American release titles and a full listing of the people who helped produce the films.

The issue finishes up with a couple of abortive book reviews, best forgotten, and a few ads.

All in all this is a pretty impressive issue. The major problem with MINDROT is that you are paying two dollars for 32 pages of material, a pretty heavy fee. On the other hand, you are getting research, well-written material, and a flow of information that is simply not available anywhere else. On line I think all of that is easily worth a two-dollar investment.

RATING: A

© 1980 DC Comics, Inc.

COLLECTOR'S CLUB NEWSLETTER #25, $1.00, *Mat Kramer, 88 Many Levels Road, White Bear Lake, Minn.* 55110, 8½ x 11", 28 *pages, photo-offset, monthly.*

COLLECTOR'S CLUB NEWSLETTER is a hodge-podge of assorted articles and illustrations revolving around the efforts of Mat Kramer to produce a comics fanzine for the members of a comic collector's club. A roster on the inside notes that they have 85 paying members at this time. Club members are expected to contribute regularly to the club publication, and the editor cheerfully tells us that most issues run ditto and are considerably larger than this special photo-offset issue.

Well then, what does the club have to say?

Not much, unfortunately.

The lead item is something called "Irish John", a piece of fan fiction that could easily serve as a living example of why most people hate and despise fan fiction. The character is a sort of super-hero being whose powers and abilities are not defined so they can change every other paragraph, the plotting is virtually non-existent, and the story is told in irregular narrative flow with few conversations between characters interrupting the process. The writing is incredibly awful. I had great difficulty reading beyond the first half-page. After I finished I didn't know why I even bothered.

There is a one-page fanzine review column (he loved everything, folks, everything!), and then an article on *THE AVENGERS*. The article specifically restricts itself to the changes in the membership and the group's by-laws over a specific run of issues. In this respect the article is successful, membership shifts and the ways the group acts under their own self-imposed rules are carefully detailed in sequential order by writer Bobby Fong. However, the piece is basically little more than an index with a few words interjected to separate the listings. The writer fails to explain *why*, or in some cases even *how* the changes in rules and membership took place. There is no real reference to background events, or to the story flow of *THE AVENGERS*, or much of anything else. Although the article is carefully researched, it is very dry and dull because of this failure to expand the viewpoint slightly and provide the kind of information that would put a little meat on the bare bones of the facts.

This is followed up by another piece of fiction, a last chapter in a continued story about a super-hero who gets his powers from enduring agonizing pain...Hey folks, I don't make this stuff up--I just report the facts. "Masochism Man" would probably be a better title for this piece, but if I were you, I wouldn't waste my time reading it.

Then we stumble along to a review of the entire *STAR WARS* phenomenon in which such memorable lines as "it gave sf writers something new and big to sink their fingers into" and "so far we have a comic book series which is pretty good. I don't read it anymore, but that has nothing to do with the quality of the magazine," and other enduring words of ignorance are rendered with a straight face. I really cringed with embarassment for this person—after I stopped laughing, of course.

Perhaps the best item in the issue is Jim Kramer's look at the inconsistencies in ther Comics Code and some suggestions on updating the regulations. The entire Code is reproduced here, for those that care. The writing here is smooth and polished. The writer knows what he is trying to say, and builds a careful case to support his conclusions. There are a couple of opinions I personally would not agree with, but that does not detract from the fact that the article is well-structured and contains the kind of writing quality and literary style that this fanzine badly needs.

And to show that they don't have it, the editor follows this fine effort up by a rambling, often incoherent bit of temper tantrum writing by John Jarzell, in which he attacks Dr. Wertham for *his* attack, twenty-six years ago, on comic books. Talk about beating a dead horse...He then goes on to scream invectives against the Comics Code and urges us all to do things to eliminate censorship of comics. An eminently forgettable piece of writing here.

There is another short article on current comic book artists that is entertaining but superfluous fluff. The writer says what he like, and says so. Ho hum.

So far as the artwork goes, the fanzine abounds with full-page drawings, most of which suffer greatly from all the obvious flaws of totally-untrained artists who insist on drawing anyway. Figures are out of proportion, backgrounds are sketchy and run into foregrounds, overcluttering abounds in almost every case, perspective is lacking, and on and on and on.

A few of the smaller spot illos, particularly the cartoons, were good and some of the cartoons evoke a chuckle, but most of the art overall is very bad.

The layout in this issue is virtually non-existent. There are no article headers, no attempts to match up illustrations with appropriate articles, illustrations are often crammed two or three onto the same page facing pages so the reader attention focus is lost. Most of the articles follow one another in straight order, that is, the editor skips a few lines on his typewriter, and then types the title of the next article and starts right along on the next item. The overall effect is cramped and tight.

At first glance this whole publication

would seem to be the work of a rank neofan, someone who has entered the hobby only a few months ago and who really knows little about fan writing or editing or art, and has never been exposed to other examples of better-produced fanzines which he could emulate.

If that were the case, I wouldn't be so hard on this issue. New fans mature rapidly and they pick up a wealth of knowledge along the way. Yet in this case the process seems to have ground to a halt. This is issue *#25* of *COLLECTOR'S CLUB NEWSLETTER*. After twenty-five issues the editor ought to be able to screen out bad writing and bad illos. He ought to be able to produce a readable issue with some semblance of balance and purpose. Yet none of these qualities are here. After twenty-five times at bat, and a strikeout on the twenty-fifth time as pathetic as this one, I am forced to conclude that there will *never* be any improvement. And frankly, that's pretty damn depressing.

RATING: F

OGRE #6, no U.S. price, try $1.50, *Colin Gould,* 6 *Marlborough Road, Tuebrook, Liverpool, United Kingdom,* L13 8AX, 6 x 8½", 32 *pages, reduced print photo-offset, irregular.*

OGRE is a British fanzine with a clear leaning towards humor. It carries a pretty broad variety of material and art, and it manages a varied record of success and failure as well.

This particular issue opens with a rather odd, almost surrealistic cover that does not give the slightest indication of the kind of fanzine awaiting you on the inside. The art is well-done, but it is a moody, dark piece with a weird, horror feeling to it. Very odd indeed, but then, if you thought the cover was odd, wait until you open the pages and read along inside.

Dismissing the editorial, which is the usual bent-knee pathetic plea for additional readers and lots of new subscription money (the kind of Community Chest mass appeal all fan editors learn to write convincingly sooner or later), we come across a review by Luke Rainford, in which he takes a close look at *URSHURAK*, the Hildebrant Brothers' attempt at a graphically illustrated fantasy novel.

This is a well-thought-out piece of work that touches on all the strong and weak points of the book. It concludes that the work was a failure. Rainford tells you exactly why the book failed, backing up his arguments with careful reasoning and a solid examination of the background events which led up to the creation of the book in the first place. This is good reviewing handled in a clear, concise style. Other fans who have reviews or commentaries in mind might do well to examine this article to see how it should be done.

There is another straight article further on in the issue, as Ian Trotter takes a look at *1994*. Unfortunately he lacks the critical facilities of his predecessor, and manages to ramble on for several pages without making any telling points. Having established through many repeated comments that he is a big fan of bad taste, blood and gore stories (with which the early issues of *1984* were well-provided), he then goes on to examine in wide-eyed surprise a story of two that repelled even him. He winds up with a disjoined and somewhat incoherent blast at Warren because Warren dared to make that back-cover commentary a few months ago about the American-Iranian hostage situation. In between that he's also alternately drawn to and repelled by the proliferation of socially relevant stories that *1994* loves to inject on a regular basis.

This is a remarkably uneven and badly-constructed writeup. I would suggest that before Mr. Trotter writes any more articles or reviews that he take a few moments to organize this thoughts first. Stream-of-consciousness writing seldom succeeds even in the most favorable of circumstances. To have that style of writing turn up in a fan publication masquerading as a legitimate article is ludicrous.

Most of the remaining parts of the fanzine are devoted to humor. In fact OGRE looks like a collection of mini-fanzines. We have "Son of Weird Trash", with a nifty fake *CONAN* cover of the warrior sitting on his "throne", and a lot of wild irrelevant comments about upcoming events in the comic book world—a number of which are extremely funny. "Ugg—Rotten Comics" is given over to satire of comic book heroes specifically, and in this case good ole Batman takes it on his two-dimensional jutting square jaw. Two one-page strip satires cover the origin of Blah Man and how Blah Man met Blah Boy, his punk partner. The art is nothing great, but the strips produced some good laughs.

A two-page strip on "Ace-Hero" left me cold. The humor was sophomoric or non-existent. The same can be said for a two-page prose story about Blah Man, which muddles along and didn't raise a single laugh while I was reading it.

Concerning the humor sections as a whole I would say that they hit about 50% of the time, and fell flat about 50% of the time. Considering the current drought of humor material in comics fanzines, a fifty-fifty batting average cannot be considered bad at all.

The last seven pages of the magazine are given over to a freewheeling letter column. British fanzines seem to thrive on fat, witty, interesting letters columns that cover the entire spectrum of fan subject matter. It's a real pity that more American fanzines can't initiate letter columns with the same depth and variety the British fans use.

Not a bad little issue here. OGRE has its rough spots, but it has a lot of personality, too. This is a zine you can love despite its faults and cheer on whenever it scores the triumphants. It's friendly, open, fannish, and informative. You might like to give it a try.

RATING: B

Trufan Confessions

by Jay Zilber

Let's Suppose...that you've just discovered the phenomenon of comics fandom over the past year or so. You've probably also discovered that there are other things to do in this peculiar sub-culture besides buying and selling comics. The urge to publish a fanzine can be a powerful one, often more so than the urge to "break into comics," because the fan press is so much more accessible to the common fan than the offices of DC or Marvel Comics. In Fanzine publishing there are no rules, no editorial fomulas or house styles, no required level of skill or competence. All it takes it the creative instinct, the desire to write and draw and communicate, to satisfy that nebulous craving for ego satisfaction and peer approval. A healthy dose of chutzpah doesn't hurt, either.

Let's continue to suppose, for a moment. So enthralled are you by the realization that there are other people who like to talk about comics and produce their own, that you can see only one clear goal in your immediate fannish career: At all costs, you've got to publish a fanzine of your very own. To which I reply, Terrific! How do you plan to go about it?

Well, let's say that you have some degree of financial independence—at the very least a part-time job—so that you can squirrel away a couple hundred dollars to pay for offset printing. It's a lot of money, but you'll make it back, you think. Maybe at the most recent comics convention you cornered John Byrne for a sketch that will make a fabulous cover. You have a friend who wants to review comics and movies, and you have another friend who's learning to draw and has volunteered to create a brand-new super-hero team for you. And you can write an article on the history of *THE X-MEN*, or an essay on why Green Arrow should shave off his beard, and you can whip up a trivia test and an editorial and a few spot illos of your own. Looks pretty good so far—a monthly schedule shouldn't be *too* hard to meet. Put a quarter-page ad in *THE BUYER'S GUIDE* to announce the coming of your long-awaited creation, and you'll take fandom by storm! They'll be lining up to buy your fanzine...your mailbox may not be large enough to hold the dozens of mail orders that will arrive daily! All you need now is a title...something cosmic and spacey-sounding, yet something that ties in with comics fandom...howabout...sure, we'll call it...*FANZOID!!*

Not to burst your balloon, but *FANZOID* is now destined to become the umpty-thousandth derivation of the same first-issue crudzine that every fan and his brother have been publishing ever since *ALTER EGO* was just a twinkle in Roy Thomas' youthful eye. What are you going to do that will make *FANZOID!* unique among the current fan press offerings? What special niche will it fill? What will make it worth the time it takes to read it—let alone the additional time and effort it would take a reader to write a nice, long, juicy letter of comment? What will make *FANZOID!* stand out from those legions of super-crudzines and make me *care* about this project into which you've poured so much time, money, and sweat?

If your answer is, "More pro artwork, a color cover, and 90% coated stock," stop right there. You're not ready to publish a fanzine.

A fanzine is a marvelous learning experience—sort of an educational toy—and I am of the opinion that anyone who wants to publish a fanzine should make every effort to do so. Unfortunately, the typical beginning fanzine publisher, having not yet had that very educational experience, is woefully ill-equipped for the venture. His (or her) enthusiasm is inevitably betrayed by ignorance, and the result is a never-ending glut of ill-conceived, badly-executed crudzines that do nobody any good at all, except to the extent that the publisher learns what *not* to do next time. Crudzines are therefore excusable—and even if they weren't, they'd still be unavoidable—but for most people, crudzines aren't any more worth reading for it.

Certainly, a fanzine publisher must first and foremost please *himself*. (Or *herself*. Hereafter, I use the male pronoun in the generic sense, applying to both male and female.) Otherwise, there would be no satisfaction to be had from amateur publishing. Nontheless, the whole point of publishing—indeed, possibly the best rationale for the existence of comics fandom in the first place—is *communication*. And if you can't interest people in reading your fanzine, you might as well be publishing gibberish or talking to yourself.

Before you publish anything, there is one question which you must clearly address: *why* do you want to publish a fanzine? If you're not sure, you can bet that your lack of focus will be evident in the hazy, directionless nature of your zine. One point which must be made from the very beginning is that the reason for publishing a fanzine has nothing whatsoever to do with making money. If that's what interests you, invest in Exxon, go to medical school, or become a comics dealer. True fanzines are, at best, a marginal-profit-or-loss operation. Publications such as *COMICS FEATURE, THE COMICS JOURNAL, THE BUYER'S* GUIDE, or *THE COMIC READER*—which *do* make money—are not really *fan*zines in the purest sense of the word. They are trade publications, special-interest magazines, and while they have a legitimate place in fandom, these magazines by themselves

present a distorted image of the fan press as a slick, professional (or semi-professional) business. Many readers of these high-circulation magazines have perhaps never even *seen* a genuine, pedigreed fanzine. For reasons that sould become obvious, they are often hard to find, and we'll discuss that problem in the near future. Meanwhile, I'd like you to take this little True-False test, to determine whether you really know what a fanzine *is*. No peeking at the answers.

1. All fanzines must be printed using the photo-offset process in this day and age. Ditto and mimeo fanzines, though common in fandom's past, are hopelessly obsolete at this point.

2. A fanzine publisher who is just starting out should hope to sell at least 1000 copies of his first issue, building a respectable multi-thousand circulation base from there.

3.Fanzine publishing doesn't take any special skills—just common sense and a lot of work.

If you answered "TRUE" to any of these statements, you are *not* ready to publish a fanzine. I suggest you delay your plans long enough to have a few of those myths debunked:

No composer starts out by writing for full symphony orchestra; no playwright's first effort opens on Broadway with an all-star cast. In *every* field, the over-entusiastic beginners want to start at the top, and fanzine publishers are no exception. However, it's much easier for a fanzine publisher to try to get away with starting at the top, but the results can be horrifying. in terms of wasted time, effort, paper, and money.

Believe it or not, those obsolete *and highly economical* methods of printing—mimeo and ditto—are still commonly used in areas of the fan press, especially by science fiction fandom where mimeo especially is still considered the standard of the small press. Granted, mimeo and ditto are far less versatile than offset, and more difficult to work with at first, but they *are used*, and they are an ideal training ground for the beginning publisher to learn his craft. Mimeo and ditto limit your circulation to however many copies one can coax out of the equipment, and the nature of ditto masters and mimeo stencils limit the physical tricks you can do with the layout and artwork. This can be a blessing in disguise; it forces the publisher to plan page layouts in advance, a valuable discipline for the beginner. And whereas offset printing usually means that you take your originals to a print shop and take home the copies a few days later, mimeo and ditto can be a direct, hands-on printing process. It will teach you the ins and outs of elementary printing, allowing you to learn what works and what doesn't work, and why. And by doing the printing yourself, you will not be put in the position of having to trust a commercial printer to care about the quality of the printing as much as you do. And finally, since the nature of these reproduction methods limits the number of copies produced, your beginners' mistakes—which are inevitable—will thankfully *not* be seen by a huge number of people, a fate which would otherwise come back to haunt you forever when you later realize what those mistakes were!

2. The current proliferation of semi-professional comics-oriented magazines, with circulations in the 5000 to 10,000 range, has caused the myth to spread that a fanzine publisher must necessarily strive to achieve these enormous circulation figures in order to be considered legitimate. This notion is patently untrue, and clouds the very reason why we have fanzines in the first place.

Fanzines are a forum for communication among people with a certain shared common interest—in our case, comics. Nobody will argue that there isn't greater egoboo to be had from having your publication read by a thousand people instead of mere hundreds, or only a few dozen. Still, a zine with a close-knit readership of 50 is perfectly valid, useful, and rewarding, with many *major* advantages to larger-scale projects. Only with such a small-scale fanzine can you maintain a one-to-one relationship with your readers. You can discuss things with that small group of friends that you wouldn't *dare* put in a publication to be seen by thousands of strangers. If this is not self-evident, then you have a long way to go before you'll be ready to publish anything for anybody.

3. There are some who will argue this point, but I maintain that fan publishing does demand certain skills beyond common sense and hard work. This is why some highly-trained people *do* make money in the publishing field. It is not an area that anyone can enter without the slightest prior experience or training. A fanzine

editor *must* have some basic skills in writing, spelling, and proofreading. Artistic skills are not absolutely necessary, since the primary mode of communication will be the English language. Still, having some degree of artistic or graphic training will help tremendously in preparing the fanzine's design and layout. One common failing among beginning publishers is that they conceive of the fanzine as a collection of individual articles, drawings, and pages which are only related to one another to the extent that they are stapled into a single book. A fanzine should be seen as a whole entity. There should be a sensible, logical, flow from one page to the next, a consistent "personality" that unifies what may be highly divergent styles among the fanzine's individual contibutors. In addition to drawing skills, having at least *some* art background and training will give you a useful perspective in making your fanzine a cohesive "whole."

A fanzine editor must also be able to distinguish good writing and arwork from bad. (Not to make any value judgements here about what constitutes "good" and "bad." That's a matter of individual taste; I'm talking about a level of craftsmanship and competence; not style or subject matter.) An editor must discern the strengths and weaknesses of his contributors, and put them to work on things for which their strengths are most appropriate. If there's anything drastically wrong with the material submitted, a fanzine editor has to make choices and follow through on them—either to have the contributor fix it, or to make the revisions himself, or to reject it altogether. None of them are easy choices when your contributors are likely to be close friends—but as editor, it is your responsibility and nobody else's.

These are not things that anybody can do. For the most part, however, they can be learned. A fanzine editor does not have to be an expert artist, writer, or decision-maker before his first fanzine can be started; there are ways of picking up enough background information to jump into the field, the most obvious of which is simply to *ask* a more experienced fanzine editor how to do it. Which is why I'm continually astonished to see so many new young publishers bent on making all the mistakes they can, without anybody's help. Perhaps they're too shy to ask for advice, or perhaps the successful older fanzine editors guard their secrets too jealously. In any case, there is much too little sharing of this information going on in comics fandom at present. This does nobody any good, and runs against the very grain of fandom's implicit purpose—communication.

Over the course of the next few installments of this column, we are going to discuss the "how-to's" of publishing low-budget and medium-budget fanzines. I use the word "we" not in the royal sense, but in the hopes of establishing a dialogue or group discussion between would-be publishers through this column. Fanzines are the very backbone of this hobby, and the onslaught of slickzines needn't indimidate anybody from getting started in amateur publishing. We'll look at our prototype crudzine, *FANZOID!*, and turn it into a first issue anybody could be proud of. If you have any specific questions, comments, or topics you want to see covered here, please feel free to write to me directly at the address below. (What I can't cover in print, I'll try to answer personally, though I'd appreciate it if you'd enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope for that purpose.)

Jay Zilber
315 East 5th St. #4-A
New York NY 10003

Comics Clubs

If you belong to a comics club and would like to be listed in this space, please send all pertinent information to COMICS FEATURE.

Fullerton, CA. WEST COAST COMICS CLUB. Meets at Fullerton Science Lecture Hall #121, California State University, 7:00 p.m. Contact: Barry Short, 420 West 4th Street, San Dimas, CA 91773 (714) 599-2488.

Maplewood, N.J. COMICS CLUB MAPLEWOOD. Meets at 29 Norfolk Avenue, 8:00 - 9:00 p.m. Contact: Comic Club Maplewood, P. O. Box 65, Maplewood, NJ 07040.

Mt. Prospect, IL. PROSPECT HIGH SCHOOL COMIC BOOK CLUB. Meets at Prospect High School, Room 130, 801 W. Kensington Rd., every Tuesday at 3:00 p.m. Contact: R. Marr.

Nepean, Ontario, Canada. INTERNATIONAL COMIC COLLECTOR'S CLUB. Publishes a quarterly magazine and bulletin. Membership is $10/year. Contact: Don Coopman, 131 Monterey Drive, Nepean, Ontario, Canada K2Y 7A9.

Phoenix, AZ. PHOENIX COMIC BOOK CLUB. Meets at Quality Inn West, 2420 W. Thomas, 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Contact: Neil Cohen, 3824 N. 15th Avenue, Phoenix, AZ 85018 (602) 227-8701.

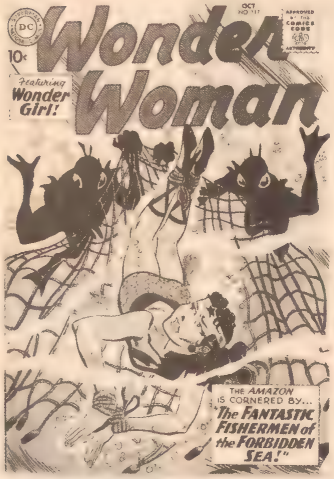
Pittsburgh, PA. PITTSBURGH COMIX CLUB. Meets at Eide's Comix & SF Shop, 11 Federal Street, every second Saturday from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Contact: Ben Pondexter, 827 Anaheim, Pittsburgh, PA 15210.

St. Louis, MO. SPECTOR COMICS CLUB. Meets at Century Bowl, 7508 Michigan, 1:00 - 4:00 p.m. Contact: Anthony Gladish, 3917 Ohio Street, St. Louis, MO 63118.

Urbana, IL. CHAMPAIGN-URBANA COMIC CLUB. Meets at the Illinois Union Building, Room 215, 712 W. Illinois, Urbana, every Thursday at 7:00 p.m. Contact: Mel DeSart.

Vancouver, B.C., Canada. VANCOUVER COMIC BOOK CLUB. Publishes the VCBC Bulletin and sponsors conventions (V-Con). Contact: VCBC, P.O. Box 48873, Bentall Sta., Vancouver, B.C., Canada V7X 1A8.

20 Years Ago this Month



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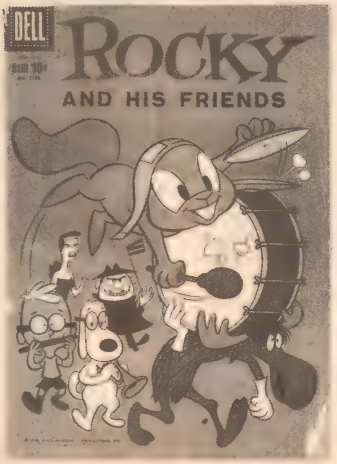

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Basically, it works like this:

First, there is a plot device. A set of circumstances in a work of fiction sets in motion a series of events which involve the characters of that work, and further events and circumstances result therefrom. If the plot device is a good one, if the writer uses it well, and if it results in interesting consequences for the characters and the work as a whole, it is, like all good things, likely to be reused, copied, homaged, and/or expanded upon in later works by the same or other authors. When the plot device becomes so familiar to readers through use and reuse that it can be easily recognized as such, discussion and comparison of the various instances of its use ensues, and the plot device becomes a "theme", or a tradition. This includes almost every basic formula of fiction, back to the primordial conflict of good versus evil as represented by a hero and a villain.

The third step occurs when a tradition, through overuse or misuse, becomes a cliche. "Cliche" is defined as "stereotyped" or "hackneyed"; in this case, "predictable" and "unimaginative" might be equally suitable terms. Originating a new plot device is extremely difficult, if not impossible, given the volume of human literature--that is to say, in short, that everything has been done, and modern writers are to a large extent left the task of either turning a new twist of an old established traditional theme, or telling an old story better--"beating dead writers at what they've already done."

Writers of comic books are perhaps more trapped in this vicious cycle than other authors, since the variety of stories that appear in comics is both traditionally and commercially limited, the largest proportion of these involving characters in the good/evil and hero/villain dichotomy, whether in the guise of old western gunfighters, soldiers, spacemen, sorcerers, or super-heroes. Most writers, in and out of comics, whether the readers recognize it or not (the writer himself *must* recognize it, unless he is either terribly ignorant or terribly conceited), rely upon the established traditions in their stories as a matter of course. Traditions, however, as we have

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ROME

by Murray R. Ward

noted, are a double-edged sword. Half the trick is to use them so that they seem new and fresh with each treatment; the other half of the trick is to not let them become cliches.

The list of cliches in comics would easily fill every page of this magazine, and then some. We will deal with only one: the death of the hero's/heroine's romantic interest.

It has been said that a new generation of comics readers crops up every three-to-five years as old readers give up the genre and new ones take it up (notable exceptions being long-time fans such as the staff of *COMICS FEATURE*).. Thus, the collective memory of present-day comic fans does not stretch back too far in terms of first-hand experience--that is, issues which the readers remember buying off the newsstands, as opposed to having heard or read about them, or having collected them as back issues. Given this limitation, it isn't surprising that most of today's comic readers would have called this article "The Gwen Stacy Syndrome in Comics". They are under the mistaken apprehension that the idea of killing off the hero's girlfriend as a plot device originated with the demise of Spider-man's beloved Gwendolyn in *SPIDER-MAN* #121.

Gerry Conway, who wrote that issue and those immediately succeeding it, and Stan Lee, who okayed the plot in his editorial capacity, are both good comics writers, however they may have been castigated in the fan press. This columnist tends to agree with Harlan Ellison's estimation of Conway as a writer who has "good stuff that he's not using"--in other words, he can write well when he wants to, but chooses not to put forth his best effort in most of his comics work, perhaps thinking to "save himself" for novels and screenplays. Lee, despite his current lack of involvement with the comics scene in any but a public-relations capacity, cannot be denied his place as the premiere comics scripter of the 1960s, the man who created the Marvel Universe. Both of these men know writing and they know comics. Neither of them would presume to say that he had invented the death-of-the-leading-

ON YOUR GUARD, MY SOLDIERS...WE ARE DEEP WITHIN THE TERRITORY OF THE EXILE, VISIR.
HIS ARSENAL SO MUCH MORE SLOWLY THAN A MAN MORTAL...
YET THOUGH FRIENDSHIP COULD NEVER BECOME LOVE...
THOSE WERE STRANGE DAYS!
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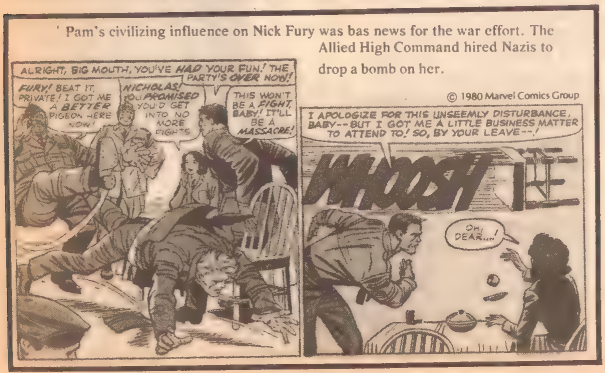
lady premise in *SPIDER-MAN* #121.

A quick look at Beppe Sabatini's recent Death Chronology ("I Swear I'll Get You For This! I Swear It!": A Look at Death in the Comics, in *THE COMIC READER* #178) shows no less than half-a-dozen instances of the lead character's romantic interest being done away with prior to the death of Gwen Stacy, in the comics of the Silver Age alone. The earliest of these is Lady Pamela Hawley, British noblewoman and army nurse, the World War II girlfriend of Nick Fury, who was killed in *SGT. FURY* #18. This story, like all the early Marvels, was penned by Stan Lee. So perhaps Stan Lee invented the death-of-the-heroine gambit and passed the idea on to Conway, right?

Well, no. Aside from the fact that those several other death stories in between Pamela's and Gwen's (no two by the same writer and not all deaths of Marvel characters under Lee's influence) there are precedents for this plot device predating the *SGT. FURY* story--in fact precedents from sources outside comics themselves. One of the most recent heroine-death epics to appear in comics was last year's *CONAN* #100, which adapted the latter half of the original story "Queen of the Black Coast". In Roy Thomas' retelling, as in Robert E. Howard's pulp original, the hero, Conan, loses "the first great love of his life", Belit the she-pirate. What many fans lose sight of is that although *SPIDER-MAN* #121 and *SGT. FURY* #18 both predate *CONAN* #100, Howard's story in turn predates the entire history of comics. While any English literature major could point out many instances of such a theme in much older works, this is perhaps its first and most famous use in adventure fiction pertinent to the study of comics literature. We may therefore consider the Conan story of Belit's death the prototype of the tradition.

Conan, however, until his transition from prose to comics in 1970, was hardly thought of as a traditional comics hero, or as a super-hero. There is a fairly large thematic gap between Conan, a pseudo-historical adventurer born a lawless barbarian (whose stories are noted for their use of sex and violence), and the comic-book super-hero, usually a modern-day crusader for law and order, who dwells in a world of largely non-erotic love affairs and simulated "special effects" conflicts. A second prototype example is needed to bridge this gap and illustrate how the theme of "Queen of the Black Coast" became first a tradition, and then a cliche of comic books. The story in question is familiar to comic readers, if not in its written version, then certainly as the motion picture made from the book: Ian Fleming's James Bond adventure, *ON Her Majesty's Secret Service*. So significant is the role of this novel that we will henceforth refer to the death-of-the-love interest theme as the "*OHMSS* Syndrome". Not only does James Bond combine the "adult" elements of Conan's adventures with a modern setting and technological pyrotechnics such as are found in super-hero stories, but the story of his loss of his bride of mere moments includes and fortifies those ingredients of the Conan story that have led to the reuse of this type of theme in comics and to its becoming a cliche.

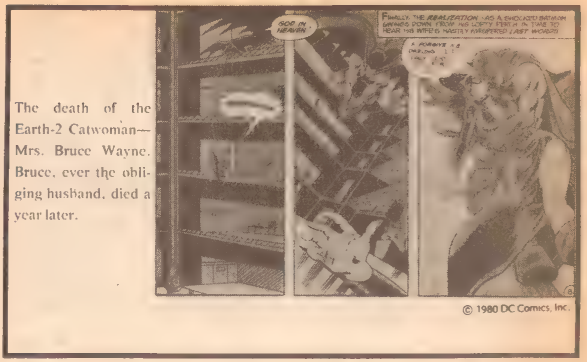
The *OHMSS* Syndrome has become a deadly cliche more through overuse than through misuse--that is, the majority of the stories in question are well-written and lead on to interesting succeeding tales of the surviving characters which would not have been possible without the death of the romantic-interest character. Occasionally, a character's death is depicted in a gratuitously off-hand manner, or does not justify its inclusion in the ongoing storyline by serving to introduce more entertaining conflicts resulting from the death than might have happened had the death not been included. We will deal with such instances in due course. For the most part, though, it is the *proliferation* of "Syndrome"-type deaths that has warped the tradition into near-sadistic parody. Besides the aforementioned fiancees of Spider-man (Peter Parker) and Nick Fury, we have also seen the following characters perish: Medic Una (Captain Mar-vell's girlfriend), Larry Lance (Black Canary's husband), Elasti-girl (together with her fellow members of the original Doom Patrol. She was Mento's wife and Beast Boy's (now the Changeling) foster mother), Lord Seth (unrequited suitor of Lady Dorma), Janice Cord (Iron Man's fiancee), Lady Dorma (Sub-Mariner's bride), Steve Trevor (Wonder Woman's boyfriend--twice), Patrick McShane (Shanna the She-Devil's suitor), Miss America (The Whizzer's wife), the Swordsman (Mantis' lover), Betty Dean (Sub-mariner's ex-girlfriend), Jarella (Hulk's fiancee) Doll Girl (Doll Man's girlfriend), Catwoman of Earth-2 (wife of the Batman of that world and also the Huntress' mother), Sindella (Zatara's wife and Zatanna's mother), Iris West Allen (Flash's wife), Serina (Appllo's bride), Batwoman (Batman's former girlfriend,


' Pam's civilizing influence on Nick Fury was bas news for the war effort. The Allied High Command hired Nazis to drop a bomb on her.
© 1980 Marvel Comics Group
ALRIGHT, BIG MOUTH, YOU'VE HAD YOUR FUN! THE PARTY'S OVER NOW!!
FURY! BEAT IT PRIVATE! I GOT ME A BETTER PIGEON HERE NOW!
NICHOLAS! YOU PROMISED YOU'D GET INTO NO MORE FIGHTS!
THIS WON'T BE A FIGHT, BABY! IT'LL BE A MASSACRE!
I APOLOGIZE FOR THIS UNSEEMLY DISTURBANCE, BABY--BUT I GOT ME A LITTLE BUSINESS MATTER TO ATTEND TO! SO, BY YOUR LEAVE--!
KWOOSH
OH, DEAR...!

Sharon Carter (Captain America's girlfriend), Marvel Girl/Phoenix (Cyclops' fiancee), Maria Pym (Henry (Yellowjacket) Pym's first wife, and Jane Foster (Thor's and Don Blake's former girlfriend, who is set at this writing to be retroactively written out of *THOR*).

..Spread over a mere fifteen years (since the Pam Hawley story in 1965), and with the majority of the demises having occurred comparitively recently, this is an appallingly high body-count. Assuming the number of comics characters with whom the reader is acquainted to be equal to the number of real people with whom he has some regular contact, this represents a disproportionate number of deaths per number of people total, not to mention an incredible unlikelihood of this many interpersonal romantic relationships ending in the (early) decease of one of the participants. Granted, the world of the super-heroes, like that of Conan and of James Bond, is a violent one, and the main characters are ever in the forefront of some battle or other, unlike their readers, who merely peruse these exploits from the safety of an easy chair. But still this begs the question: why does the romantic interest character have such a high death toll? Perhaps the hero/heroine is not as apt to suffer loss of life, despite facing greater and more frequent danger, due to his/her possession of powers, abilities, skills, and experience beyond that of the (often) non-combatant boyfriend/girlfriend. (We shall set aside the obvious consideration that should the hero die, the series would end, whereas the love-interest could be replaced in most cases without affecting sales figures.) But why do more fiancees die than, say, heroes' best friends or sidekicks, or even villains?

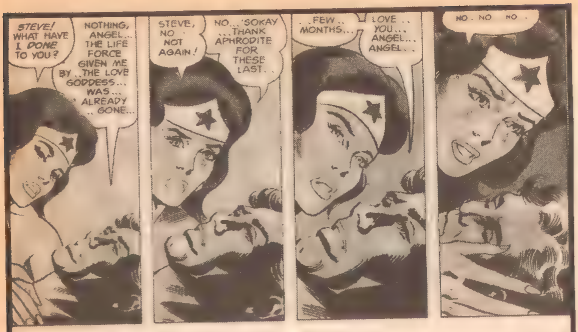
This is the insidious nature of the *OHMSS* Syndrome, and it is also the quality which elevates it to the standing of a literary tradtition. The mere death of a central character, however similar the circumstances, cannot qualify as a major theme. The death of the lead character of the opposite sex, however, not only leads automatically to a dramatic plotline involving the quest for retribution from the perpetrators (since comics characters tend to die of inflicted violence--that is, accidental or premeditated killings--rather than succumbing to disease or old age), and changes in the main character's life brought on by the loss of a loved one, but it preserves the hero/heroine from a fate worse than death for a continuing adventure character: the consummation of the love relationship in marriage. Sidekicks can hang around and talk shop with the hero endlessly and involve him in no threat more dangerous than the occasional accusation of homosexuality from the likes of Dr. Wertham. Villains by the very nature of the good-versus-evil theme and the dictum of the Comics Code that crime never be allowed to go unpunished can do no lasting harm. But romance, carried to its logical conclusion, can kill the hero! (Or, so the story goes.)



The death of the Earth-2 Catwoman—Mrs. Bruce Wayne. Bruce, ever the obliging husband, died a year later.

Let's get back to our prototypes. Conan is basically a wanderer--mercenary soldier one story, pirate the next, and at the last, a king. If his exploits could be turned into a TV series, it would resemble in many aspects such shows as *THE FUGITIVE* or *THE INCREDIBLE HULK* in that our hero would be the only continuing character, adventuring in a new locale in each installment. Having him fall in love with one solitary female, rather than having a "girl in every port", would quickly destroy the format of the series by isolating the formerly far-roving barbarian in one locality, "saddled" with a lover, who would eventually become a wife, which would lead to children. Clearly, Conan cannot take a wife until much later on in life when he settles in Aquilonia and becomes its ruler. Given that Howard knew that Conan would end his life as a king before he wrote the earlier incidents in the Cimmerian's career, the character of Belit becomes rather obviously foredoomed. Since she is as much a rover in her way as is Conan himself, she can be allowed a long relationship with the hero (stretching from #58 to #100 in the comic) before giving up the ghost. Also, since *CONAN* is a sword-and-sorcery strip set in a prehistoric age, the characters are not under the pressures of a conservative modern society to marry and raise a family, so they can remain lovers over a span of many issues. But eventually, even had Howard not so ordained, Roy Thomas would have been obligated to do away with Belit so that Conan could go on to have a) adventures that did not involve the pirate-queen and her followers, and b) relationships with other female characters he encounters without violating his own moral character by being unfaithful to his declared lover.

The same is true of 007 in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service.* Although Bond has a more established base of operations than Conan and operates in a modern and civilized world, he is still a world-traveller and, as his superior, M, phrases it, "a womanizer". Like the barbarian hero, the secret agent protagonist traditionally has a


STEVE! WHAT HAVE I DONE TO YOU?
NOTHING, ANGEL... THE LIFE FORCE GIVEN ME BY THE LOVE GODDESS... WAS... ALREADY GONE...
STEVE, NO NOT AGAIN!
NO...SOKAY THANK APHRODITE FOR THESE LAST...
...FEW... MONTHS...
I LOVE... YOU... ANGEL... ANGEL...
NO. NO. NO.

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Steve Trevor's two deaths. The second (above) seemed just an easy way out of a stagnant sub-plot. The first, though, showed real analytic motivation: According to editor Mike Sekowsky: "Steve was dull and boring so I got rid of him."

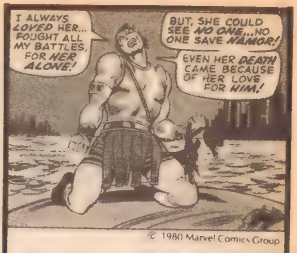
different female companion in each adventure, with whom he parts company in between episodes. (The movie Bond has even begun to acquire a secondary characteristic of this formula--in each picture, he has two girls, one of whom is disposed of in some way--usually killed by the villain--and one of whom survives to the last frame.) In *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, however, James Bond goes all the way. He takes the plunge. In short, he marries the heroine, Tracy, at the end of the novel. In the shocking climax, Tracy is murdered by Bond's arch-foe, Blofeld, before the happy couple can even begin their honeymoon. Thus, Bond is free to continue his life as an agent, which he had contemplated giving up before his marriage, and to continue his amorous activities in the pursuit of his assignments without any guilt-feelings about Tracy waiting at home.

The Syndrome is somewhat justified in its transposition to comics from prose and film, in that the hero's familiar milieu *is* threatened by such irrevocable alterations as the acquisitions of wife or child. Where the comparison breaks down is in the supposition that *all* comics heroes must continue in the Conan/Bond mode, and that death is the only acceptable means of exorcising the unwanted love-interest. Once the tradition becomes established through repitition in several series, even the dullest long-time reader can predict the succession of events as readily as if he were viewing his comics through a crystal ball: Once the couple becomes officially engaged, the fate of the hero/heroine's consort is sealed. Of course, there have been exceptions to the rule, else there would be no marriage or childbirth stories in comics at all. The rule of the unmarried main character stands, however, as in almost every case the character getting married is not the main character. The hero's friends can marry (Foggy Nelson in *DAREDEVIL*), his surviving ex-girlfriends can marry (Betty Brant in *SPIDER-MAN*, Betty Ross in *HULK*), members of hero-teams who do not star in their own series can marry (The Vison and The Scarlet Witch, Yellowjacket and The Wasp,

both in *THE AVENGERS*), even sidekicks (Thomas "Pieface" Kalmaku, and Doiby Dickles--each with their respective brides--both in *GREEN LANTERN*) and villains (Lex Luthor--twice--in *SUPERMAN*, The Kingpin in *SPIDER-MAN*) can marry. The hero, however, must remain unwed, if not unattached. Simply put, he must have a girlfriend or readers would find him dull. D stands for Domesticity, which means Dull. (Until recent years, one felt a real compassion for the super-heroes, since while the rules of the Syndrome kept them from getting married, the rules of strict comic-book morality kept them from indulging in premarital sexual relations. Now, although everyone but Conan must make love off-panel for the sake of the youngsters in the audience, there are lovers--in the full sense of the word--in comics.)

One can imagine the various super-heroes studying these statistics for fiancee mortality and coming to some startling conclusions as to the options open to him. 1) The hero can remain aloof from romance altogether, a la Doc Savage. That way lies madness. 2) The hero can forever play two or more women off against each other, as Superman did for years with Lois Lane and Lana Lang. Eventually, though, even the Man of Steel had to make a choice. 3) The hero can play the field, a la James Bond. Comics are less of an adult medium than prose or film as yet, however, and only The Sub-mariner and (more recently) Iron Man have ever played this game with any degree of success in terms of reader-identification. The super-heroine leads are denied this option, by the way, in one of the last remaining triumphs of male chauvinism. In comics, nice guys don't fool around, and nice girls don't even recognize the possibility of such an occurence. 4) The hero can have a continuing relationship with one partner, whom he can never marry for fear that he/she will be killed instantly. The only suspense lies in whether she will die immediately before or after the ceremony. 5) The hero can marry and hope for compassionate writers and editors. After all, Flash stayed married for years before Iris was murdered. 6) The hero can retire, either from active super-herodom, or from being a major character with his own title, and then get married. A lot of DC characters have been successful with this escape clause: Atom, Adam Strange, Doctor Fate, Hourman, Aquaman (although when he regained his own book, his infant son was killed). 7) The hero can experience marriage vicariously through a counterpart on an alternate world (Superman and Batman of Earth-2). 8) The hero can find a writer and editor who will give him one of the aforementioned off-panel love affairs. These can be gratifying in terms of companionship and sexual satisfaction, but can never result in offspring. (As of *THE AVENGERS* #200, Ms. Marvel is the first unwed mother in super-heroinedom, and will probably be the only one for a long time to come.) Somehow, each of these alternatives leaves something to be desired.

Is there a way out of the *OHMSS* Syndrome? Let's look at each of the Deaths-by-Syndrome from our earlier list. Several of the characters met their ends more through editorial paper-shuffling than from dramatic exigency; for sales reasons, a character was being put through a Big Change which required the writing-out of some superfluous supporting cast members. At a recent comics convention, one writer (who shall remain nameless) mentioned the existence a few years previous of a rumored "hit list" making the rounds of the office of one of the major comics companies. This was supposed to be a list of characters who were allowed to be killed off by their writers if the story called for such a development. One can assume that the following characters at one time or another comprised said "hit list". Medic Una died because Captain Marvell's plotline was undergoing the first of several radical changes in an attempt to save his dying title; Larry Lance died so Black Canary could come to Earth-1 with the Justice League and fall for Green Arrow; Elasti-Girl died because *THE DOOM PATROL* was dying; Patrick McShane died because Shanna lost her book and no longer needed a supporting cast; Miss America died to give Quicksilver and


I ALWAYS LOVED HER... BROUGHT ALL MY BATTLES FOR HER ALONE!
BUT, SHE COULD SEE NO ONE...NO ONE SAVE HAMOR!
EVEN HER DEATH CAME BECAUSE OF HER LOVE FOR HIM!
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Lord Seth, played by Robert Goulet. He loved Lady Dorma and lost her. She lost, too, by the way.

The Scarlet Witch a (subsequently declared false) origin; Swordsman died so he could come back as a plant and get the girl (you have to admit that *that* one is *different--unique*, even); Doll Girl died in flashback so Doll Man could pursue her Earth-1 lookalike; Catwoman of Earth-2 died to give the Huntress an origin; and Maria Pym died to give husband Henry a guilt complex which would prevent him from immediately marrying the Wasp.

Other characters were killed for no reason that this critic can fathom: Lord Seth (if his love for Dorma was hopeless from the start, why introduce him at all? On the other hand, had he won Dorma, she might not now be deceased.); Betty Dean Prentiss (after 35 years of off-and-on life in The Sub-mariner's feature, she deserved a death at least equal to Dorma's, but they didn't even bother to change her back from an amphibian first); Sindella (Zatara was retired anyway, so why not leave him his wife?); Batwoman (She, too was retired. Why kill her?); and Jane Foster (Why not stick to the original idea of giving Sif a Don Blake-like Earth identity?).

The remaining characters were all killed by acute *OHMSS* Syndrome. Had Nick Fury married Pamela Hawley, he would not have played well as the Bondian hero of the present-day *S.H.I.E.L.D.* series. There was nothing to keep Spider-man from marrying Gwen Stacy, and Spider-man is the traditional loner character, so Gwen had to die. Likewise, there were no further

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Sad to say, this cover was not a come-on. Namor and Dorma did marry, and she did die right after.

obstacles to the union of Iron Man and Janice Cord, so she perished. Namor had actually wed Dorma, when she was killed in the most direct recreation of the *OHMSS* ending. Jarella was unique in that she loved both Bruce Banner and the Hulk. A happy Hulk rampageth not, so exit Jarella. Iris Allen is one character who owes her end more to Gwen Stacy than to James Bond; in the words of one writer/editor, it was felt that "a death would put a little life into the book (*FLASH*)", which was selling poorly. Even though their long-established marriage had not impeded the progress of the series, Barry and Iris were felt to be stagnating as characters, and Iris was starting to talk about raising a family (horrors!), so poof! No more Iris! A single Apollo is more interesting than a married Apollo, and besides, Jane Seymour was leaving the *Battlestar Galactica* TV series, so Serina's death was easy to foresee. Captain America and Sharon Carter had eliminated all impediments to wedlock, so after several writers ignoring Sharon for several years, she was brought back just long enough to die--in flashback, on *videotape*, yet--easily the most dispassionately impersonal death of a loved one ever depicted. Anyone still not believe in the Syndrome?

We are left with two rather unique cases: Jean Grey and Steve Trevor. The circumstances surrounding the death of Phoenix were the #1 topic of discussion at all this year's major comic conventions, especially those where members of the *NEW X*-men creative team were in attendance, and the story-behind-the-story has been documented as fully as it probably ever will be in public in *COMICS FEATURE* #4. Jean was unique in that while she and her lover were members of a team, and not characters supporting a book all by themselves (and thus should have been as immune to the Syndrome-death as, say The Vision and Wanda in *THE AVENGERS*) they were also the leading man and leading lady of the series in that they (and Professor X) were the only remaining members of the original X-men team. In a very real sense, the story of *THE X-MEN* was, up to Jean's death, the story of Scott Summers and Jean Grey. Although Jean's death was not as premeditated as a typical Syndrome-death, it is interesting to note how easily the writer fell into the trap of following the dictates of the Syndrome scenario when faced with countless other options to resolve the Phoenix plotline.

Steve Trevor, like Jean, died twice. (Jean "died" to become Phoenix, in *THE NEW X-MEN* #101.) First, he was killed by an editorial blue pencil when it was decided that Wonder Woman would lose her powers and undertake a new career as a non-powered heroine. Many issues and editors later, he was revived--with a difference. The reincarnated Trevor knew Wonder Woman's secret identity as Diana Prince. What no one handling the Amazon's series ever seemed to realize was that Steve Trevor is himself a tradition in comics. He is to Wonder Woman what Lois Lane is to Superman. As a living tradition, Lois can never marry Superman (except on Earth-2 and in Imaginary Stories), but likewise she can never be killed off or written out of the strip. Likewise, Steve is an invulnerable part of the Wonder Woman mythos. His first death was a mistake; his return may have been a bigger one, given his new knowledge. After a very few issues with WW no longer able to put off confrontations with Steve by hiding in her Diana identity, the relationship came to its penultimate moment. Steve reaches for Diana, only to be told, "Not now, Steve. I have a headache." Before this admittedly fascinating dilemma of the Amazon's could be resolved, the series shifted to 1940s Earth-2 (or Earth-TV) in homage to the current TV series. By the time the comic returned to normal, it had been decided to kill Steve again. Again a mistake, which has just recently been corrected. In Steve Trevor's case, as in Lois Lane's, the *OHMSS* Syndrome is impotent. Superman cannot lose Lois Lane because she is too well-known a character to the general public (especially since the movie) to be done away with. Wonder Woman cannot lose Steve Trevor because no other lover is good enough for her (Steve may not measure up either, but try telling WW that).

So to return to our earlier question, is there a way out of the *OHMSS* Syndrome? Curiously, the disease may provide its own cure. We have seen that because of the relatively high turnover rate of comics readers, not many fans remember all the deaths-of-lovers that have occurred in

Easily the most grotesque death-scene in comics: Sharon Carter burned to death guest-starring on "The Muppets."

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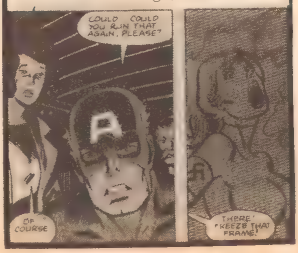

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This famous book is *not* the initiator of the OHMSS Syndrome. It just seems that way.

comics, or their increased frequency in recent years. However, the closer together that these stories are published, the greater the chance that more fans *will* remember, and remembering, *rebel*. If enough comic readers become incensed at this frequency of the love-death cliche, we may yet see comics writers and editors declaring a moratorium on Syndrome-deaths for the foreseeable future. There *are* other ways to end a relationship if marriage is out of the question, and some of these have been used in the past, though none as frequently as the Syndrome. There *are* ways, also, to continue a relationship without allowing it to stagnate. Perhaps the writers could put a little of their real-life experience to good use here, as writers are supposed to do when they write. And finally, there *are* ways to do away with the *OHMSS* Syndrome altogether. Heroes can be married and not boring. How? Were I a professional comics writer, I would look on it as a challenge to my ability.

Here's to the death of a chiche.

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MARVEL COMICS

The following comics will bear a ***March*** cover date and will be on sale in ***December*** (November shipping schedule)

SPIDER-WOMAN #36 — Written by CHRIS CLAREMONT. Art by STEVE LEIALOHA and BRUCE PATTERSON. Spider-Woman begins her new life in San Francisco — just in time to be attacked by the all new, all different, and all-*female* ***Banshee!*** Guest starring Nick Fury and some X-tra special Marvel faves!

MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #73 — Written by RALPH MACCHIO and MARK GRUENWALD. Art by RON WILSON and GENE DAY. The ***Thing*** and ***Quasar*** fall through the Nth projector to the dawn of time and encounter ***Devil Dinosaur*** and ***Moon Boy!***

STAR TREK #12 — Written by MARTIN PASKO. Art by JOE BROZOWSKI and KLAUS JANSON. Kirk and crew become involved in a sordid 23rd Century scandal which puts their reputations — and their very lives — in peril!

SPIDEY SUPER-STORIES #51 — Easy to read tales of the Web-slinger plus a carload of special Marvel-ous guest-stars and the meanest villains you ever saw. Co-produced by Marvel and the Electric Company.

KING CONAN #5 — Written by ROY THOMAS. Art by JOHN BUSCEMA and DANNY BULANADI. Beginning Marvel's adaptation of L. Sprague DeCamp's "Conan the Avenger!"

MARVEL SUPER-HEROES #95 — Re-presenting Incredible Hulk #146. Story by CONWAY with art by TRIMPE and J. SEVERIN. In the desert sands, the Green Goliath takes on the Israeli army! Plus, the *Leader* returns!

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #214 — Written by DENNY O'NEIL. Pencils by JOHN ROMITA JR. The Frightful Four seek vengeance on Spidey and guest-star ***Sub-Mariner.*** And it looks like they're gonna *get* it, too!

CAPTAIN AMERICA #255 — Written by ROGER STERN. Art reproduced directly from JOHN BYRNE's pencils! Landmark issue marking ***forty years*** of Captain America. The untold tale of Cap's first case (check yer back issues; it's never been recounted!).

THOR #305 — Written by MARK GRUENWALD and RALPH MACCHIO. Art by KEITH POLLARD and CHIC STONE. Galactus' former herald, Gabriel the Air Walker, returns — and he's mad!

MICRONAUTS #27 — Story by BILL MANTLO. Pencils by PAT BRODERICK. While SHIELD and Hydra battle to the death, ***Baron Karza*** launches his invasion of Earth — and it all takes place in the greatest amusement park of them all!

GHOST RIDER #54 — Written by MICHAEL FLEISHER. Art by DON PERLIN. In Las Vegas, Ghost Rider's luck runs out when he runs into his old enemy, the Orb!

SAVAGE SHE-HULK #14 — Written by DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT. Pencils by MIKE VOSBURG. The shattering conclusion of the ***She-Hulk—Man-Wolf—Hellcat*** saga. This one's got so much action — and answers so many questions — you can't afford to even *think* about missing it!

MOON KNIGHT #5 — Written by DOUG MOENCH. Art by BILL SIENKIEWICZ and KLAUS JANSON. A terrible crime committed in the past threatens the lives of Moon Knight and Marlene in the present!

INCREDIBLE HULK #257 — Written by BILL MANTLO. Art by SAL BUSCEMA. Continuing his Middle-Eastern Odyssey, the Hulk wanders to Egypt where he teams up with the Arabian Knight to combat the menace of Gog and Magog!

AVENGERS #205 — Plot by BOB BUDIANSKY. Script by DAVID MICHELINIE. Pencils by DON NEWTON. Inks by DAN GREEN. The Avengers race against the clock to stop the Yellow Claw's mad plan of creating a servile Master Race!

CONAN #120 — Written by J.M. DeMATTEIS. Pencils by JOHN BUSCEMA. Conan as you demanded him — in action, in adventure and in more trouble than any barbarian deserves to get into!

MARVEL TALES #125 — Reprints Spider-Man #148, written by CONWAY with pencils by ANDRU and inks by ESPOSITO and HUNT. The Jackal and the Tarantula vs. Spidey — Round II! Plus More on the mystery of ***Gwen Stacy!***

DAREDEVIL #169 — Written and penciled by FRANK MILLER. Inked by KLAUS JANSON. The Kingpin and Bullseye team up to take over the mobs — and to hand Daredevil his greatest challenge yet!

COMING ATTRACTIONS

STAR WARS #45 — Written by ARCHIE GOODWIN. Pencils by CARMINE INFANTINO. The spirit of ***The Empire Strikes Back*** is carried on in "Death Probe!" as a remote-controlled Imperial probe-droid takes over Luke's ship with the intention of infiltrating and destroying the Alliance fleet!

X-MEN #143 — Written by CHRIS CLAREMONT. Art by JOHN BYRNE and TERRY AUSTIN. While her fellow X-Men are on vacation, Kitty Pryde fights alone against the deadly demon invader of X-Men HQ!

ROM #16 — Story by BILL MANTLO. Art by SAL BUSCEMA. Cover by BOB LAYTON. Having acquired a small group of human supporters, ROM must now defend them against a menace so old that even the Dire Wraiths have forgotten it exists! Plus: Saga of the Spaceknights introduces two amazing new knights!

MAN-THING #9 — Written by ROBERTA McKENZIE. Pencils by LARRY HAMA. Inks by DANNY BULANADI. Cover by BOB WIACEK. A tragic family feud sets the stage for this moving tale of birth, death — and a macabre monster called Man-Thing.

FANTASTIC FOUR #228 — Written by DOUG MOENCH. Art by BILL SIENKIEWICZ and JOE SINNOTT. The investigation begins into what could be the most important question of the FF's career. What is the true extent and nature of Frankin Richards' powers?

MARVEL TEAM-UP #103 — Written by TOM DeFALCO. Pencils by HERB TRIMPE. When the Scorpion comes gunning for J. Jonah Jameson, the mustachioed publisher's only hope to survive lies in two certain Bugle free-lancers, Peter Parker and Steve Rogers. You may know them better by their professional names — the Amazing ***Spider-Man*** and ***Captain America!***

IRON MAN #144 — Cover by BOB LAYTON. Two titanic tales of the golden Avenger this issue, one from the present and one from the hallowed days of years gone by. In the present-day story, written by DAVID MICHELINIE with art by JOHN ROMITA JR. and BOB LAYTON, Iron Man fights his final battle with Roxxon's microwave-powered flunky, the Sunturion! Then, look back in wonder on Shellhead's never-before-revealed first post-origin adventure. This one's written by MICHELINIE with art by JOE BROZOWSKI and LAYTON.

PETER PARKER #52 — Written by ROGER STERN. Pencils by MARIE SEVERIN. "The End of a Hero!" This book-length thriller reveals the final fate of the ***White Tiger*** — and what a fate it is!

DEFENDERS #93 — Written by J.M. DeMATTEIS. Art by DON PERLIN and PABLO MARCOS. Cover by RICH BUCKLER and AL MILGROM. A maddening new menace, and the Hulk and the other Defenders must stop it — or die!

MARVEL SUPER-ACTION #29 — Reprints Avengers #68, written by THOMAS with art by S. BUSCEMA and GRAINGER. "And We Battle For the Earth!" to save it from Ultron!

MASTER OF KUNG FU #98 — Written by DOUG MOENCH with art by MIKE ZECK and GENE DAY. Shang Chi is indeed the Master of Kung Fu. But there is a new fighter on the scene who vows to take both Shang's title — and his *life!* You've never seen battle 'till you've seen *this* one!

MARVEL SPOTLIGHT #11 — Written by BILL MANTLO. Art by STEVE DITKO. A two-bit hood gains the power of ***Captain Universe*** — and uses it to wreak vengeance against the Maggia chieftain who tried to kill him!

MARVEL MAGAZINES
(cover dated February)

CRAZY #71 — Cover by BOB LARKIN. If you don't get some laughs out of this issue — you're probably dead already! We've got PAUL KIRCHNER's "Marvel Super Heroes That Didn't Make It!" HOWARD CRUSE's "How To Shape Up Your Flab!" "Cut tom Toasters," with art by FRANK SPRINGER, a parody of "WKRP," an important anouncement about a new irritating ***Obnoxio*** *contest* plus Teen-Hulk, Behemoth Jack, Howard the Duck and whatever else we find lying around.

SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #61 — Written by MICHAEL FLEISHER. Pencils by JOHN BUSCEMA. King Knossus, jealous of Conan's popularity among his people, sends the Cimmerian on a mission he ***cannot*** survive!

THE HULK #25 — Cover by JOE JUSKO. First, "Dreams of Iron, Dreams of Steel!" written by BILL FLANAGAN with art by GENE COLAN and ALFREDO ALCALA, in which the green Goliath uncovers a sinister espionage ring in the middle of a home for retarded children. Then, LORA BYRNE and GENE COLAN dish up the off-beat "Carnival of Fools!" in which the Hulk becomes a captive carnival attraction. Thirdly, Dominic Fortune stars in a special Christmas story written by DENNY O'NEIL with paintings by HOWARD CHAYKIN, in which the battling brigand comes up against a sadistic 7-foot tall Santa Claus! And — as if all that weren't enough — we're also gonna treat you to a thought-provoking history of the split-personality in literature written by STEVEN GRANT. Who says this isn't the Marvel Age of Bombastic Bargains?

While we will never knowingly print inaccurate information in these pages, Marvel Comics reserves the right to make any changes which may become necessary. We're sorry for any inconvenience this may cause. — The Bullpen

SLEAZE

AND THE MARRIED SUPER-HERO or: "What Goes on Between the Covers."

by Richard Howell

Super-hero comics (much as we older types might like to think otherwise) are written for kids. Their primary components are suspense and thrills. Excitement is paramount--and boring, mundane elements are to be avoided at all costs. When Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, and Steve Ditko introduced a new generation of readers to the dynamism of their own brand of super-hero action with the important addition of the super-heroes doing "normal" things and experiencing mundane events (having problems at school, going on dates, bickering, having parties, etc.), a wonderful breakthrough was made. Not only could the reader empathize more with the super-heroes who did the same things and felt the same emotions as he/she, the reader, did, but somehow those same activities seemed infused with that much more exotic appeal. Vicariousness with a backward twist; if Thor does it, its's automatically noble, and we-the-readers can be noble if we do it too. More realism was introduced into comic books, and Real Life gained a few more followers.

However, there was one common real life experience which was continually shunted aside: that point in the life of each adult when he or she feels sufficient attraction, respect, and compatibility with a member of the opposite sex (plus sufficient personal maturity and stability) to enter into a long-term relationship and partnership with that other person. This is usually (though not always) portrayed as "marriage".

For a comics character, marriage is the ultimate *big step*. Dying just means that the writer and artist won't have to worry about you anymore (until your clone shows up). However, most adults *do* have relationships, affairs, and/or marriages in their lives, and most comic characters are, or do become, adults. The relatively low number of married or meaningfully involved super-heroes indicates that something inhibits most of these characters from taking the *big step*. Why? What could possibly force the most powerful men and women of their respective *milieus* to live lives of loneliness, unfulfillment, and/or (gasp!) celibacy?

Some of the reasons for this tendency can be gleaned by talking to comics writers--especially those that claim to specialize in mature themes and characterizations. These conversations, whether in person or via interviews, bespeak in comics writers an attitudinal malaise peculiar to practitioners of their genre which has become so ingrained into the medium as to be unquestionably accepted by their readers and their characters alike as fact: MARRIAGE IS BORING. MARRIED SUPER-HEROES ARE BORING. ONCE A CHARACTER MARRIES (and throughout this article, we render "marriage" synonomous with "mutually responsible affair"), HE/SHE BECOMES LESS INTERESTING/LESS SALEABLE/MORE ESTABLISHMENT AND THAT CHARACTER'S STRIP LOSES SOME CRUCIAL ASPECT OF THE SUSPENSE AND TENSION OF THE (*de rigeur*) ROMANTIC SUB-PLOT.

In one of the above-alluded interviews, the claim was made that "you can't show any of the fun stuff about being married", thus reducing the married state, all of which can be shown in comics except for sex, to a caveat for sexual relations...period! This implicitly informs the reader of the fact that the other

DC
YOU SAID IT COULD NEVER HAPPEN!
THE WORLD'S STRANGEST HEROES!
DOOM PATROL
JOIN THE WORLD'S GREATEST WEDDING PARTY!
NOT A HOAX! NOT A DREAM! IT'S THE REAL STUFF!
ELASTI-GIRL MARRIES MENTO!
© 1980 DC Comics, Inc.

Rita Farr, career woman in the brotherhood of wise-cracking freaks, married Steve "Mento" Dayton. They had one of the livelier marriages on record, although it ended with *THE DOOM PATROL* magazine.

Aquaman and Mera have a relatively happy comic-book marriage—neither of them died (though their infant son did). Aquaman's position as a responsible family man gave his book a much-needed focus.

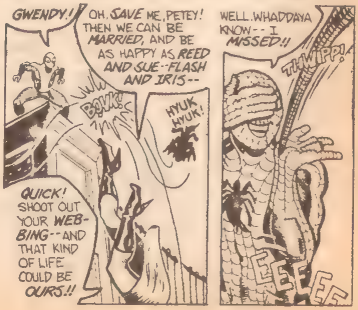
benefits of marriage for the normal adult (i.e. mutual support, relative stability, the steady adjustments and compromises necessary to maintain compatibility with the personal changes of one's partner, encouraged growth and maturity, etc.) are not "fun stuff". Are they odious duties? Chores? What, then?

It is further stated that with a married couple "you can't indulge in any of the raunchy speculation", correctly assessing the sexual presence in the dream-identification-idealist aspect of super-heroes (which seems to explain the fact that comic men and women represent the idealized types to the predominantly male artists and writers. The creators are presenting their own basic sexual archetypes--men defined with muscles, women by sexual equipment) but somehow falling into the misconstrusion that after marriage the raunchy aspect of adult life (sex-related stuff again) is no longer the attractive "fun-sleaze" it was before the two partners had more emotional committment (or legal insti tutionalization) to the bond. Simply put, it implies that sex with no strings is fun, but sex with a wife or husband is a cheerless chore. The damage is compounded when Sue Storm is described as being as boring as she is because she is a "married old lady", thus reducing those in the married state (regardless of the individual personalities involved, as implied) to bland, sexless shadows of their former selves.

Unfortunately, this prejudice against matrimony or its extra-legal equivalents is not the perverse mindset of a few, or even a handful, of comics writers. It is a widespread and so unconsciously binding an edict as to be, as has been stated, an "unwritten law" in comics. In the thinking of the majority of comics writers, comics readers, and the writer's prejudged assessment of his reader's expectations, marriage is equated with tedium, an end to adventure, an end to personal growth, the mystical transformation of "fun-sleaze" into dutiful, boring, sex-of-convenience, and thus, naturally, something to be avoided. Few, if any, of the positive points of "settling down" are emphasized, or in some cases even recognized. Comics writers seem to prefer their characters--and assume that their audience prefers to see their characters--in a state of protracted adolescence.

We submit that this prejudice is a blind spot tht occurs because of the unfortunate predisposition against mature relationships in comics. It is true, as was stated in one of the aforementioned interviews, that the romantic subplots in each book create a positivist sexual tension which encourages reader interest and participation, but to assume that that tension and interest is forfeited upon the characters' establishment of a mature love relationship is a harmful misconception. (Remember Marvel's explanation of Gwen Stacy's fate in terms which indicated that her only options were marriage or death. No wonder superheroes are reluctant to risk life and limb to establish relationships and/or marriages--it's a documentable health hazard!) Characters' inherent excitement need not change on the basis of their establishment of a stable relationship any more than real people necessarily suffer losses of allure and vitality when mated. The problem is not in the situation, but in the treatment.

Consider the examples of several couples demonstrably related to the questions raised in this essay. If Sue Storm and Reed Richards were anything *but* the Mr. and Ms. Tedium they were before their marriage, then perhaps their mating could be said to have blanched their vividness. But as the facts stand, the Richardses are boring together because they were boring seperately—two null sets still equal zero, and it's just a simple case of addition. The same circumstances apply to Barry (flash) Allen and his late wife Iris (when alive): the institution of marriage cannot be held responsible for the deeply-ingrained dullness of characters who choose to cluster together under its auspices. As further proof, some characters who range from vivacious to under-delineated (but full of potential) have retained their pre-nuptual personalities more-or-less intact. Janet Van Dyne Pym is, if anything, *more* full of exuberance, sassiness,


GWENDY!
OH, SAVE ME, PETEY! THEN WE CAN BE MARRIED, AND BE AS HAPPY AS REED AND SUE--FLASH AND IRIS--
BOINK
HYUK HYUK!
QUICK! SHOOT OUT YOUR WEB-BING--AND THAT KIND OF LIFE COULD BE OURS!!
WELL, WHADDAYA KNOW-- I MISSED!!
TWIP!
EEEEE

and "fun-sleaze" than before (and her hubby Hank has loosened up somewhat since his marriage to Jan. (As shown in *MARVEL FEATURE* #10, *MARVEL TEAM-UP* #59, and the last two years of *THE AVENGERS*, among other places, Jan seems to be quite capable of maintaining her pre-marital level of attractiveness and sexual interest—and she shows no signs of sliding into the classification of "old, boring, married lady".

Indeed, as indicated in the theoretical portion of this essay, some couples seem to have profited significantly from their mating (shades of Real Life!) The Scarlet Witch-Vision marriage seems to have improved the outlooks of both characters: engendering more demonstrable humanity, forbearanee, and tenderness in The Vision (cf. with *THE AVENGERS* #147 and 183), and encouraging Wanda's previously-frustrated attempts to realize her potential (*THE AVENGERS* #128, *GIANT-SIZE AVENGERS* #2, *THE AVENGERS* #161, #186, etc.). Doctor Strange and Clea have a potentially ideal lover/partner situation, in which Clea studies under and assists the Doc. There is a personal interchange which eases her loss of goals and his near-fatal loneliness—which is usually presented with a good deal of compassion, romance, and "fun-sleaze" (see *DOCTOR STRANGE* #1, 6, 29, etc. With the exception of the sleaze quotient, the romance between the original Cyclops and Marvel Girl was very similar in tone). The keynote to their relationship is mutual betterment, not "stability" in the pejorative sense, because the strip's real tensions and conflicts are left unchanged by the good mating luck of the protagonists. It wouldn't do for Doctor Strange, to be guzzling beer while Clea vacuums the rug—when Dormammu came calling, although on the face of it, that seems to be the consequence of marriage in the minds of comics writers.

Perhaps the strongest standard-bearers for married superheroes would be Hawkman and Hawkgirl, who have very non-demonstrative, undynamic, "establishment" personalities, yet whose otherwise unsubstantiated capacities for support, devotion, and committment to mutual endeavor were masterfully and touchingly brought into focus in *JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA* #145-6.

KATAR, PERHAPS YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE MENTIONED MY MEMBERSHIP!
I, TOO, FEEL THE JUSTICE LEAGUE'S RULE TO BE UNFAIR, BUT I HAVE NO WISH TO DIVIDE THEM OVER IT.
NONSENSE, MY DARLING! YOU ARE TOO GENEROUS WITH THESE PEOPLE!
TRADITIONS GROW THROUGH INERTIA--NOT PROGRESS! THE TRADITION AGAINST DUPLICATING POWERS EXISTS BECAUSE NO ONE HAS EVER CHALLENGED IT!
WE ARE ALIENS HERE, SHAYERA! IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, DESPITE MY JLA FRIENDSHIPS, YOU ARE MY ONE TRUE COMPANION IN LIFE--AS I AM YOURS!
I SHALL CHALLENGE ANYTHING THAT SERVES TO COME BETWEEN US!
© 1980 DC Comics, Inc.

These two are M-A-R-R-I-E-D!

A true Kirbyesque courtship: He loves black lips, she adores square fingers. What more need be said?

THEN, LET'S DO SOMETHING THAT DOES COUNT! LET'S GET MARRIED! RIGHT AWAY!
THERE'S STILL A LITTLE MATTER OF OUR ENEMY--
© 1980 DC Comics, Inc.

Finally, as the apparent exception which actually strengthens the thesis further, the affair between The Black Widow and Daredevil (*DAREDEVIL* #81-124), although a failure in terms of longevity, actually brought more facets of each partner's personalities and values to the reader's (and the other characters') attention than had been possible before: Their differing interpretations of their vigilante status (#101, 108), Matt's chauvinism (#91) and insecurities (#108, 116), and the Widow's vulnerability (#108), protectiveness (#117), and *weltschmertz* (#109). The trial marriage of these contrasting characters accentuated the dynamism and dictinctiveness of each.

Is that because the caharacters were ideal for that purpose? Yes, but any claim that exciting characters in comics are rare is,

continued on page 78

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Guilty Fantasies

by Peter B. Gillis

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I hate it. I just hate it.

There I was, hard bent on another column (this one featuring a mud-wrestling bout between Power Girl and the She-Hulk on top of the Man-Thing--my sensitive treatment of Feminism in the Comics) when I was interrupted.

Making a graceful ten-foot *jete* into my room was a large man dressed in a spangled tutu. My stereo headphones had fallen down over my eyes, so it took a moment to recognize the man as Hal Schuster, head of New Media/Irjax. For a moment he stood there, not even breathing hard. I was impressed, but something bothered me.

"Hal, will you stop holding that hula hoop over your head?"

"It's a halo, and I'm your guardian angel."

"It's a hula hoop."

With a sigh, he tossed the hoop away. It made a perfect two-bank shot off two of my walls, and made a perfect ringer on my lamp.

"I read your column in *COMICS FEATURE* #3--"

"I should hope so. You publish the book."

"--and I was so touched, that I've decided to grant your wish. I'm giving you your own comic book company."

"Naw."

"No, really! I'm not kidding!"

"Come on."

Hal pouted, and adjusted the rhinestone tiara on his head. "You don't believe me."

I stared him closely in the face. Then I looked through the doorway through which he had leaped. There stood Hal's brother Jack. He was grinning silently, and holding a canvas sack up for me to see. There was a big dollar sign on it.

"Jesus H. Blasco," I exclaimed.

®

But it's true. All of it: I swear. New Media Publications is moving into producing comics, and I'm the new Editorial Director. And we're going into it in a big way. We'll be producing magazines on a regular schedule, with new characters and new ideas by the best talents in comics

today.

There are two things I'm bringing to this new post: one, I'm a long-time comics junkie--and two, I get bored easily. The direct outgrowth of these characteristics will be: one, that we'll be doing *comics*, with few pretensions and no apologies, comics that tap into that rich vein of excitement and imagination--*entertainment*--that has kept me interested in these odd, cheap books all these years. Two, that I'm not going to allow us to produce recycled or clumsy or dull comics. I don't know about you, but I don't want to read stories I've read before; I want to read books that surprise me. Neither do I want books or strips that aren't well-told, where either the story bogs down in trivia or the pictures, however pretty, don't move the narrative along.

Good comics. You know.

Sure, I know every comics editor will tell you the same thing, and, to tell the truth, it seems so simple and straightforward that ya gotta wonder why everybody didn't do it. And we're going to do it by the simplest, most straightforward method possible: allow the creative people an opportunity to let their mental muscles stretch a bit; let them do what they've wanted to do; give them the rights to what they create. No big secret.

I think we're going to knock your socks off. So does Hal. So do Richard Howell and Carol Kalish, my two Consulting Editors and partners in crime. All we have to do is rack our brains and work like maniacs, putting it together. And if (when!) we do succeed, the question shouldn't be "How did they do it?" but "Why aren't all comics this good?" It puzzles me too, because the magic's all there, everywhere around us, just waiting. We're going to wrap up some of it and publish it. If enough people did just that, the New Media Publications would be superfluous. But they aren't: as a matter of fact, they're going to be filling a void.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm off to get fitted for a tutu.

And now you know why I said "I hate it. I just hate it."

Guilty Fantasies is *NOT* going to become the Stan's Soapbox of New Media Publications. I'll be doing the editorials for the books as they come out, and we'll be giving you information on our future projects (about all I can tell you about what's in store fight now is that we plan on two magazine-size books called *ADVENTURE ILLUSTRATED* and *FANTASY ILLUSTRATED*, and some books devoted to super-heroes (superheroes? super heroes?) that won't be Marvel or DC imitations). But not here: none of this "Hey there, true believers! Don't forget that *ZOMBIES OF THE OLD WEST #5* is on sale right now wherever quality publications are sold!" In fact, the major difference between New Media and Marvel, DC, or elsewhere is that ye olde Editorial Director hereby reserves the right to mumble, gibber, and moan about things other than the Company's Official Line. And *COMICS FEATURE* will never be the publicity arm of the NMP comics group. It's one of the reasons I'm so pleased that Richard and Carol are in charge of *FEATURE*: They're fiercely independent and disagree with me on a number of points. *FEATURE* will continue to cover the whole phenomenon of comics as it has done in the past.

There's a part of me that would rather not be doing any of this publishing stuff. Part of me wants to just sit back and write: write comics, write columns, write short stories and novels. To read books and fanzines and comics and say "this stuff stinks" and "why do they publish this junk?" and "whatever happened to Ogden Whitney?": you know, a nice irresponsible existence.

Of course, most of me is really fired up about the possibilitues of this comics group, and is ready, willing and eager to convey that enthusiasm to you out there. But the thing I don't like about public-relations writing is that it tends to sound like that's all I want to talk about, and that's simply not true. There's still the Peter Gillis who read Adam Strange as a little kid; who became a devoted Marvelite and stayed tht way for many, many years; who fulfilled a childhood dream and got to write for Marvel; a Peter Gillis who, like, *lived* the Sixties, y'know?; who saw a friend stumble into his frat house after her throat had been slit by a mugger; who speculates on how *he* would handle Superman if given carte blanche on the character; who once made an absolute idiot of himself in front of Harlan Ellison. Remind me to tell you about these guys sometime. Here.

At this point in my writings, I was interrupted. Eight or nine people, all wearing tutus, made *grand jetes* into my room. I brushed the beads of sweat from my brow and looked up. All of them vaguely resembled me, although three had no beards and were overweight, and one had hair down to the middle of his back and was wearing a headband. A few held doughnuts over their heads.

"What is it now?" I said wearily.

"We've come to take you down to the Avengers' Mansion. Wonder Woman and the Hellcat are going to be mud-wrestling on top of Clayface. It's a fund-raiser for ERA," one of them said.

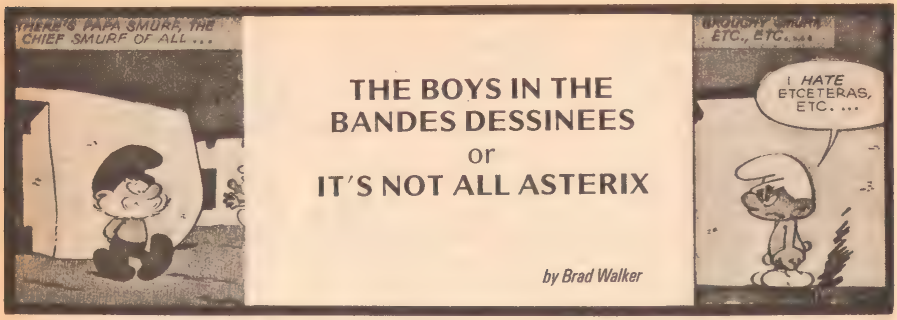
"How can you pass this up?" said another.

"I'm a professional editor now, you guys," I protested. "I don't have time for this silliness."

One of them affixed me with a glittering stare. "Bull. You're just a fantasizer like everybody else. Now come on."

I got up from my typewriter and put on my socks and shoes while the other figures practiced *plies*. I hate it when you start to lose control of your fantasies, when they start to become real.

I just hate it. ●



THE BOYS IN THE BANDES DESSINEES or IT'S NOT ALL ASTERIX

by Brad Walker

The first thing that strikes you is the variety; the walls of this Paris bookshop are covered with albums, similar to the softback *ASTERIX* and *TINTIN*s you see in America. But these are French (and Belgian) characters, with a totally different tradition, an entire heritage behind them. Oh, sure, there are some familiar faces--Eisner, Schulz, Capp, hardbound collections of *SUPERMAN*, the big white books of Barks' ducks and Gottfredson's mouse--but that's only a small part. The rest of them have been running for years without your knowledge, and to come upon twenty years of accumulated adventures all at once is overwhelming.

There are, of course, the Big Guns: *ASTERIX, TINTIN, LUCKY LUKE, THE SMURFS,* and *LIEUTENANT BLUEBERRY*. There are spies, monsters, mystery, and science fiction; gag-a-day and double-volume continuity. Egyptian princes, airline stewardesses, and malevolent pixies. Many strips reflect the fascination with America, from the Wild West to Prohibition Chicago. And nary a superhero to be seen.

Why?

Why do the francophone nations prefer albums to comic books, continuity to episodes, "straight" adventure to long underwear?

The wellsprings of all this comic art--in French "*Bandes Dessinees*" or a band of designs--lie in a handful of weekly magazines: *SPIROU* (published by Dupuis, who handle the Smurfs), *PILOTE* (Dargaud; where Asterix got started) and *TINTIN*. There are, of course, others; but those are the main ones. Rather than 17 pages a month, an artist will do two (perhaps four) per week. These books sell incredibly well by U.S. standards; *SPIROU* sells an estimated 200,000 per week in Belgium, France, and Holland.

The U.S. methods of packaging comic art have been tried, according to Dupuis editor Thierry Martens, but they proved unsuccessful; French newspapers in the fifties tried a special comic page on Wednesdays; when that failed, all interest in newspaper strips went with it.[1] But the weekly magazine, starting with *SPIROU* in 1938, was a success. Stories were told in serial form ("continued next week"), which led to album compilations and additional royalties. The success of the weeklies created monthlies and quarterlies with complete stories, which led to more albums. The album was thus established as a fundamental comics form. In 1979, Martens estimates, Dupuis sold 7.5 million albums; Dargaud (Asterix) and Lombard (Lucky Luke) combined, 10-12 million. With other, smaller publishers, the total is between 22 and 25 million.

[1] *Or most of it. French newspapers do run strips, but not on any special page. They just stick it in as filler, generally.*

"Our comics are more for kids," says Martens; "In the U.S. you work for older people." In the late forties and early fifties there was a reaction to American comic strips. In the States that reaction led to the rise of Dr. Wertham and the self-censorship of the Comics Code, but in France and Belgium the call for censorship came from the government. Objections were found to Tarzan (white supremacy); Marines killing Japanese at Iwo Jima (racism); even to a space opera in which the gangsters' rocket beat the good guys' to the moon! "Mad scientist" stories like that one were felt to undermine the public's confidence in the creator-custodians of the Atom Bomb. "In 1948," says Martens, "Belgian comics could do *anything*; in 1949 came French censorship--no death, sex, yellow villains, or foolish scientists!"

What was left? The children's market, then sewn up by Disney. The artists had a choice; either be prohibited in France (and thus starve) or tailor their stories for the young. The first big name in the new order was Andre Franquin, who took an existing character (Spirou the bellhop) and added large doses of humor, adventure, and satire to his already-running stories. Franquin's style was not Disneyesque, but that oversight was taken care of by Roba ("Boulle et Bill") and Peyo.

Pierre Culliford's childhood nickname was Pierrot, like the clown, and a cousin mispronounced it into Peyo. He used it as

his professional name when his gag strip "Poussy" ran as filler in the newspaper *LE SOIR*, starting in 1949. In 1952 he started the magazine adventures of Johan and Pirlout, which were inspired by the Errol Flynn version of Robin Hood. "I've seen it a lot of times," says Peyo. "It stops my age for me!"

Johan and Pirlout tramp around an unspecified medieval land--well-populated with dragons and wizards, and one time came across a village of little blue people called Smurfs.[2] The Smurfs proved popular enough to get their own feature in 1958, the same year as Peyo's fourth major creation, Benoit Brisefer. (Benoit is a little boy who can jump a helluva long way,) "Oh yes, I still do them all," says Peyo. "It takes me two or three days to do a page. It takes me that long because I write it out first--being careful to put the punchline in every bottom right-hand corner."

About his Disneyesqe style, Peyo says, "They prefer a quiet style in Europe. They want me to draw round. I began drawing my stories for children and now they're grown up, they're used to the style.

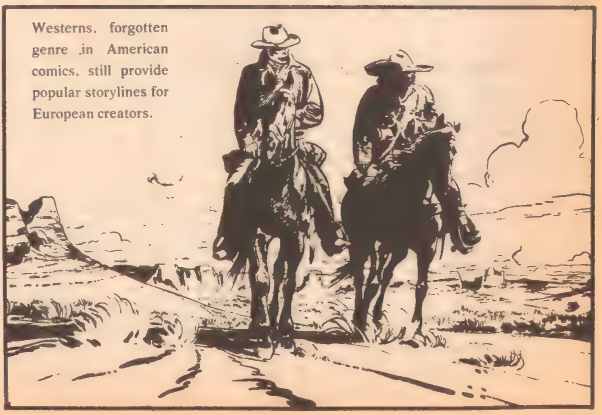
"I learned to design, to draw, in the same "school" where I've learned English. I've had no formal training. You must want to explain a story to want to draw. I like the cartoons of Al Capp; I am a great admirer of *MAD MAGAZINE* and especially of Sergio Aragones. In Europe I like Asterix, Tintin (which is not a *big* influence on my work), Franquil and his "Gaston LaGaffe", all the others."[3]

Peyo's association with *SPIROU* magazine has brought him fame and wealth, although it isn't the only outlet for his work. "Besides *SPIROU*, I have cartoons in French and English newspapers--even in South Africa. I went to Britain recently to design an ad campaign for British Petroleum: "Service With A Smurf!" Others may draw the Smurfs, but I reserve --and use--the right to correct them. The campaign runs in South Africa and Australia as well. The first cartoon feature, *THE SMURFS AND THE MAGIC FLUTE*, is already out. I've been to New York and Los Angeles about Smurf toys and projected New Yord distribution, maybe by the end of this year."

Smurf albums are already on sale in some comics shops and through certain distributors. These are British translations done by Anthea Bell and Derek Hockridge, known for their work on "Asterix" and "Lucky Luke".[4] But they haven't been generally released in bookstores as yet; the sales of *ASTERIX* albums have not been encouraging. "Albums are part of our gift-giving," says Peyo, "but the American people are not conditioned to buy albums.[5] Perhaps a 50-cent comic book... The Smurfs' first U.S. appearance will be in two pop-up books now being prepared in either Singapore or Columbia."

The Smurfs have made Peyo a rich man, but they've sharply curtailed his productivity, according to album editor Martens. "Peyo takes one year, now, to do what a starting artist does in three weeks. First year, an artist does enough material for two albums. Then he gets paid and slows down to one album a year. Then when he's well-known it takes two-three years to do an album."

And French and Belgian artists do get paid well for their work, one of the difficulties in getting U.S. syndication. "In U.S. syndication, it's around $500 for first publication and nothing thereafter. The Belgian system is $200-$300 a page at first. But then come albums--50% rights of 30-40 thousand books distributed in 16-20 countries (foreign reprints included) can add up to $10,000! With reprints as the years go by, there can be 100,000 to 1,000,000 books, or thirty to three hundred thousand dollars on albums alone, not counting magazine work and any money



Westerns, forgotten genre in American comics, still provide popular storylines for European creators.

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[2] *See Sidebar: "Smurf City, Here we Come."*

[3] *I'd like to thank Michel Michel for interpreting some of the more intricate responses. Michel translated and played the lead in the Parisian version of the ROCKY HORROR SHOW.*

[4] *The French, and many American artist and collectors who have discovered the French editions, call them "Schtroumpfs." But since the reader will be seeing the British translations, I prefer to call them by their Flemish name, Smurfs.*

[5] *This tradition extends to Britain. In October the publishing houses come out with hardbound albums called "annuals"; these are based on comic strips, TV shows, or movies. Of indifferent quality and printing, they rely heavily on reprints and unknown artists. "Muppet Madness" is a U.S. printing of the first British Muppet annual; you'll notice that the first story is a Muppet version of the traditional British pantomime, Cinderella.*

from selling the originals! This is a good system for the artists, more money and less pressure."

But less pressure on the artists means less material for the publisher. And don't think that this just leaves more room for unknown cartoonists; besides the natural tendency for publishers to go with proven draws, the market for original albums is decreasing. "Only 600-700 new titles of comics come out a year," says Martens, "but 2000-2500 reprints come out--one new title to two or three reprints."

The reason, according to Martens, is television. If people get a complete story in one sitting, then they have no desire to follow a story stretched out over several weeks in a comic magazine. "People have no more patience," says Martens.

Martens becomes quite florid over the artist-publisher relationship. "When the artist doesn't work, the publisher should be able to bring in someone new." As an example he cites "Les Tuniques Bleues" ("The Bluecoats"), a humorous treatment of the American Civil War. The strip was drawn by Salverius and written by Cauvin and did all right. But Salverius died, and Dupuis brought in Willy Lambill (who does a joke strip about a downtrodden cartoonist named *Lampill*). The Lambill-Cauvin stories became best-sellers, with annual sales of half a million albums. Martens' point is that the strip wouldn't be a success today if the publishers hadn't stepped in.

As might be expected, not all artists agree with this point of view. In fact, Albert Uderzo and Rene Goscinny of "Asterix" agreed to disagree with their publishers, Dargaud, and formed their own publishing house, Albert Rene, last year. Asterix would only appear in albums by Albert Rene, which would handle only "Asterix" and no other strips. Unfortunately, Rene Goscinny died on October 1, 1979, almost a month after the breakaway.

Albert Uderzo is a quiet, warm, person. His offices at Albert Rene are clean and modern; the lobby features a large photograph of him and Goscinny with Asterix and Obelix. "I did both jobs, the writing and the art, on *"Le Grande Fosse"*--"The Big Ditch". It will come out

SMURF CITY HERE WE COME!!!

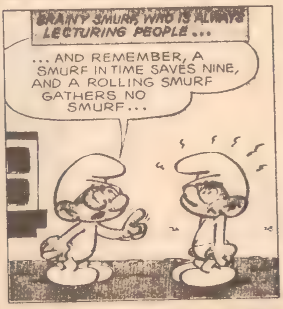
The Spanish call them *Pitoufos*, the Dutch, *Puffes*, and the French, *Schtroumpfs*. The English call them by their name in Flemish--the Smurfs.

Lke Asterix, Lucky Luke, and Tintin, the Smurfs are European cartoon characters that are only recently reaching an American audience. They're featured in TV commercials, records, children's books, and an animated motion picture, but mainly in albums of their reproduced magazine adventures.

A Smurf can be classified as one of the "Little People" such as elves, trolls, leprechauns, and other mystical midgets. But Smurfs are unique unto themselves.

A Smurf has blue skin, round ears, a white hat, and trousers. Most Smurfs have no magic powers. They are practically immortal, living thousands of years. Their homes are shaped like toadstools. They eat vegetables and cakes; their favorite treat is a leaf of sasparilla.

So much for externals. All Smurfs speak a smurfic tongue--which means they substitute "smurf" for any work they choose: "What is smurf, has a green smurf, and smurfs when you smurf it?" "I don't know--a smurf?" "No, *two* smurfs!"



That describes your basic Smurf. What Peyo has done is to invent a new sort of elf, multiply him by 100, and give each one of those figures a distinct personality. THe names are the keys to the individual Smurf's characters, much like Snow White's dwarves. Thus we have Lazy Smurf, who can't stay awake; Greedy Smurf, a glutton (money is unknown in the village); Hefty Smurf, the strongman; Grouchy Smurf, recognizable by the refrain: "I *hate* (fill in the blank)"; Vanity Smurf, the clotheshorse; Rocker Smurf, he of the tin ears; Jokey Smurf, the prankster; Poet Smurf; Farmer Smurf; Brainy Smurf, the one in the glasses--not so much brainy as he is a knowitall, a tattletale; and above them all is Papa Smurf, the bearded, benevolent, father-figure, the only one who's *supposed* to do magic. (The younger Smurfs get their hands on his equipment at times and smurf up a real mess.)

"I see the Smurfs as a community," says Peyo, "a sort of critique on Man's world." And that is the attraction of the Smurfs. They are a microcosm, the whole world reflected in a small place. In "King Smurf" the focus is on government, from elections to royalty, repression to rebellion. The climax of "The Smurfette" comes during the craziest trail since *DUCK SOUP*. As can be seen, the Smurfs' adventures stem from their interpersonal relationships. Even when they unite against the elements or the supernatural, it's because one of their number got them into that mess in the first place, as in "The Weather--Smurfing Machine."

The Smurfs have an archenemy, the wizard Gargamel, whose only motive is revenge. Gargamel shows up in about half the stories. In "The Smurfette", he haits upon the idea of a female Smurf to break the hearts of the all-male village (And no, if they're all boys, I don't know where they came from.) Anyway, Gargamel uses the following ingredients to infuse like into a

clay figure: "Sugar and Spice, but nothing nice...A dram of crocodile tears, a peck of bird brain, the tip of an adder's tongue, half a pack of lies (white, of course), the slyness of a cat, the vanity of a peacock, the chatter of a magpie, the guile of a vixen, and the disposition of a shrew, and of course--the hardest stone for her heart..." When the figure comes to life, she is flighty, emotional, and superficial. I won't give away the plot, but it can be seen why some critics called Peyo a male chauvinist pig.

"I was accused of being a misogynist (for "Smurfette") when that's the attitude I wanted to satirize," says Peyo. "All my friends tell my wife that she looks like the Smurfette."

Trina Robbins was so taken with "The Smurfette", that she created her own. We hope you have as much fun with this "Smurfette" paper doll as we did. Hell, *more* fun!

on June 10th and the English version a year later. The little village is split down the middle by a Big Ditch."[6]

In addition to "Asterix", Goscinny was writing "Lucky Luke" and "Iznogoud"[7] when he died, and both artists are busily searching replacements. "Goscinny," says Martens, "was practically the first person in Belgium who tried to tell a story--that is, where the story came over the pictures in importance."[8]

Herge's Tintin, Peyo's Smurfs, Goscinny and Uderzo's Asterix were each first published in Belgium-bases magazines, and that, says Martens, accounts for their strong story sense: "A story must have suspense, humor, adventure; it must be something people read with pleasure. That is the Belgian characteristic."

That these features have succeeded is obvious; less obvious, perhaps, is the debt that they owe to their restrictions. With sex, racism, violence, and death de-emphasized, nothing is left but straightforward adventure. And sex has been d emphasized, amazingly enough. One of the newest success stories is a strip about a

[6] *There is a Romeo and Juliet subplot, going by the cover. Thanks to Christian Phillipsen, Managing Director of Publicity for Albert Rene, for his help.*

[7] *"Lucky Luke", drawn by Morris, is a comedy-western. "Iznogoud" is ancient Persian palace intrigue. British translations are generally available wherever ASTERIX IS SOLD.*

[8] *For more on the careers and work of Goscinny and Uderzo, see the Paulette Carroll articles in THE COMIC READER.*

doe-eyed stewardess named Natacha, drawn by a former apprentice of Peyo's, F. Walthery. Despite her undeniable sex appeal Natacha doesn't so much as date; she has no boyfriends, just a platonic companionship with Walter the steward. (In the time-honored tradition of female-lead adventure strips, Walter is a bit of a dork); the point is, Natacha never even kisses anybody, at least as far as I've seen.[9]

If you thought that cartoonists would sooner or later rebel at these restrictions, you'd be right. "In France at the beginning of the 50s," says Martens, "the magazines tried to do stories in the same manner. But in the 60s they had low sales. The only big sellers were reprints of digests, thirty or forty of them, each with one or two stories apiece. From 1968, the artists tried to have more importance than the story--the French characteristic."

The preference for art over story culminated in *METAL HURLANT* (*HEAVY METAL*), but there were other magazines that sought freedom in subject material. One of them is *FLUIDE GLACIAL* (*ICY FLUID*), published by French UG artist Gotlib. *FLUIDE GLACIAL* shows a bit more gore and sex, but its heaviest influence is Kurtzman's *MAD COMICS*.

"*CIRCUS* is the most commercial of the undergrounds," says Martens. "Their weekly circulation is between 40-50 thousand."[10]

Other magazines have their impact. "*MICKEY MOUSE MAGAZINE* is getting important. But ⅔ of its material is Disney, both U.S. and foreign, and with reprints of "Mandrake", "Hagar", and "Tim Tyler's Luck" there is very little French art in it."

So the big magazines are still *SPIROU*--"60-70% humor, the rest adventure with practically no realism. The readers take part in an adventure. They have to give something; we don't ask them to think, to look at it dispassionately."--*TINTIN*--"60-70% realistic adventure, the rest humor"--and *PILOTE*--"Very French. When they started in 1958, they were the New Wave: more art, contemporary life, the *MAD* influence."

The French-Belgian heritage, then, is founded in weekly magazines and the resulting albums. They are child-oriented, or at least they started out that way; any careful reader of "Asterix" knows there's a lot that would go over most young readers' heads. But young people are often the lead characters, showing up their elders (cf. Tintin and Captain Haddock). The variety of locales and periods is

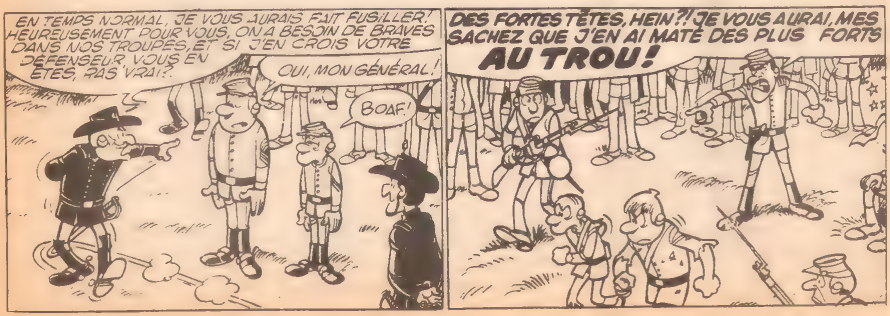
astounding, and the production values, the paper, color printing, and binding are breathtaking.

Unfortunately, most U.S. comic fans won't be able to find or enjoy these volumes, unless they can read French and live near a French-language bookshop. Only the very biggest sellers get translated into English, and then only the continuity ones. (Franquin's "Gaston LaGaffe"--which he left the "Spirou" strip to do--is one of the most popular characters in France, but his adventures are gag-a-week and thus unlikely to be translated.) Still, francophone comics are worth going out of your way for. They are a major part of the graphic story tradition, and that's one language we all speak.

[9] *The Smurfs' love for the Smurfette, like Obelix' for Panacea, is a bashful adoration that has nothing to do with the sex drive.*

[10] *CASCADE COMIX MONTHLY, July 1979, has more on the French UG scene.*

Cauvin and Lambill are the current collaborators on *LES TUNIQUES BLEUES*, a popular historical strip based on The Civil War.


EN TEMPS NORMAL, JE VOUS AURAIS FAIT FUSILLER! HEUREUSEMENT POUR VOUS, ON A BESOIN DE BRAVES DANS NOS TROUPES, ET SI J'EN CROIS VOTRE DÉFENSEUR, VOUS EN ÊTES, PAS VRAI?
OUI, MON GÉNÉRAL!
BOAF
DES FORTES TÊTES, HEIN?! JE VOUS AURAI, MES SACHEZ QUE J'EN AI MATÉ DES PLUS FORTS
AU TROU!

The Silver Age of Comics

CHAPTER V

"Who can he be? Why is he frozen solid?"

"Look, beneath his tatttered clothes—some sort of colorful costume!"

"Wait! Don't you recognize it? It's the famous red, white, and blue garb of—Captain America!"

Welcome to 1964!

A man twenty years out of his native time once more strode through the four-color world of comic books. Unlike the Human Torch who merely took his name from the 1940s character or the Justice Society of America who retired between the Golden and the Silver ages, Captain America was thrown from the Forties to the Sixties with no chance to become acclimated to the changing times. In *THE AVENGERS* #4, he was found frozen solid in the North Atlantic by The Avengers. Once revived, he detailed how, while stopping a sabotage plot which had resulted in his tedious sidekick's death, he was thrown—in a state of shock—into the icy Atlantic and was frozen for twenty years. (A bit far-fetched, granted, but if you were a member of a group consisting of a twelve-foot man, an inch-high woman, a rich industrialist encased in armor, and an Asgardian god, you would tend to accept the improbable a bit more easily than the average person.) Cap himself took longer to adjust to the concept of being a living anachronism. Whenever he wasn't fighting alongside the super-group, he would sit around Avengers' mansion brooding. WW II vetrans would stop him on the street and

by Brian Boerner

praise him, while teenagers would wonder who the weirdo was wrapped in the American flag. (Amazingly enough, this more or less reflected the reaction of the comic book audience itself.) Within a year, Cap had not only become the central character in *THE AVENGERS*, but had also spun off into his own strip in *TALES OF SUSPENSE*. Not bad for a character who had spent the last twenty years as an ice cube, eh?

Cap wasn't the only major character to be rescued from obscurity that year. *DETECTIVE* #327 featured the return of comicdom's most revered sleuth as the "New Look Batman" made his debut. (see sidebar.) Simultaneously, another DC character who had just barely survived the Fifties was also revamped. This time, though, the character was Wonder Woman, and the emphasis was pointed at the Golden Age as the series was set back into the 1940s with little explanation about how and why the alteration was made. By the end of the year the attempt was ruled a failure and *WONDER WOMAN* was returned to the present, a little the worse for wear.

Back across the track at Marvel, all the careful work and preparation involved in creating a consistent and realistic look for the various series began to pay off. The volume and individual ages of the readership were increasing dramatically, and Marvel comics became *de rigeur* on campus. Term papers with titles like *"Spider-Man Strives for Status in Competitive World of Insincere Super-Heroes"* and *"Hark, The Hulk Hurtles Into Your Heart"* were accepted in college English Literature classes. In a fit of inspiration—or insanity, take your pick—Stan Lee came up with the concept of the Merry Marvel Marching Society (M.M.M.S.), a group for people who hate such groups. Despite all the publicity, Marvel really didn't expand that much during 1964. The only new books were *DAREDEVIL* and *MARVEL TALES*, an origin reprint annual. What did expand were the secondary character lists, as many heroes and villains made their debuts in established strips. The Scarlet Witch, Dormammu, Hawkeye, Wonder

BATMAN! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
I--I GUESS SO! TH-THE LAST THING I REMEMBER IS THE EXPLOSION...
BATMAN--YOUR MASK! QUICK--TAKE IT OFF!
© 1980 DC Comics, Inc

THE "NEW LOOK" BATMAN

by Richard Morrissey

In 1964, when most of the DC line was selling very well, the Batman titles were an unfortunate exception. They had been steadily losing sales ever since Jack Schiff had become full editor upon Whitney Ellsworth's retirement. Schiff honestly wanted to produce good stories the readers and fans would like, but he never seemed to come up with the right ideas--he'd try innovations that had worked with other characters, such as imaginary stories, extended "families" of heroes, and science fiction elements, but that didn't fit at all into Batman's adventures, The recent revivals from the Julius Schwartz stable had proven that costumed heroes still could reach a large and enthusiastic audience, and the Superman titles of Mort Weisinger were also on the upswing--so it was decided to rearrange the editors to make better use of each one's strong points.

WORLD'S FINEST COMICS, which featured a joint adventure of Batman and Superman as its lead feature, was fitted into Mort Weisinger's schedule by allowing him to devote the final third of both it and *ADVENTURE COMICS* to reprints. The other two Batman titles, *BATMAN* itself and *DETECTIVE COMICS*, went to the editor who'd done so much to make other Golden Age heroes into more recent successes: Julius Schwartz. In exchange, Jack Schiff was given the two Schwartz science-fiction titles, *STRANGE ADVENTURES AND MYSTERY IN SPACE*--for which, it was hoped, his predilection for bizarre aliens would be more appropriate than it was for Batman's solo adventures. It meant that the SF fans would have to give up favorite features like the Fox/Infantino *"Adam Strange"*, but the DC executives figured that the company's

second-oldest hero needed the Schwartz team more than a minor character like Adam did.

And indeed he did. The art in the *BATMAN* title showed a marked improvement upon Schwartz' accession, even though it was still signed by Bob Kane. It's now well known that, after the early 1940s at the latest, Kane did little if any of the art signed with his name--but reports vary as to what extent "his" art was produced at DC and to what extent it was subcontracted to other artists by Kane himself. Whatever the circumstances, the "Bob Kane" art in the early 1960s had been quite poor (the last of the really good Kane ghosts, Dick Sprang, having retired several years before) but Schwartz gave the art a more refined look. I do know that Joe Giella inked most of the Schwartz stories signed by Kane, and have even heard that Giella did some of the pencilling, too (if so, it's the only pencilling I've ever known Giella to do) as did Sheldon Moldoff. Whoever did these stories was competent, though a cut below the rest of the Schwartz stable of artists. The initial stories in Batman's own book were also by the same people who'd written them for Schiff: Bill Finger (Batman's co-creator and first writer--no stranger to Schwartz), backed up by France E. Herron.

DETECTIVE COMICS, whether deliberately or not, was treated by Schwartz as a more experimental, innovative title throughout his editorial tenure. Half of its stories were still by whoever ghosted for Kane, but there was no doubt whatever as to who did the other half--the same artist who had been drawing "Adam Strange": Carmine Infantino. I've heard that he was allowed to sign the stories because he refused to let Bob Kane sign them, but Kane was talked into allowing it when it was pointed out that the fans would recognize Infantino's style anyway. Jack Schiff had taken *DETECTIVE*'s old back feature, the *"Martian Manhunter"*, with him (relocating him in another of his titles, *HOUSE OF MYSTERY*), so Julie decided to make Carmine the sole artist (both pencils *and* inks!) on the back feature as well--which would feature a supporting character Carmine had created for the Flash, *"The Elongated Man"*.

The stories in *DETECTIVE* were also commissioned chiefly from Schwartz' regular stable of writers--particularly Gardner Fox and John Broome, although the former had written only a handful of very early Batman stories in 1939 and the latter had never handled the character before. The very first "New Look" issue of either of the Batman titles, *DETECTIVE* #327 (May, 1964), featured this completely new team. With Infantino art on both stories, a Batman adventure by Broome and an Elongated Man tale by Fox, the comic was closer to an issue of *THE FLASH* than to the Schiff Batman titles.

The lead story, "The Mystery of the Menacing Mask," was a perfect example of the Schwartz innovations as applied to Batman. It was all done on a more leisurely scale than traditional Batman stories, opening not with Batman and Robin rushing to answer the Bat-Signal but with Bruce Wayne and Dick Grayson wandering through "Gotham Village" and discussing the recent rise in crime there. In the course of the adventure they encountered a secret criminal hideaway and a super-scientific but non-costumed villain who'd discovered a way to keep Batman and Robin from approaching them--whom they battled and eventually overcame with their wits, fists, and what equipment became available. At one point the new team's inexperience led them too far in that direction, when Batman concluded a fight by picking up a criminal's gun and covering his opponents with it. As the older fans wasted no time in informing Julie, Batman and Robin had long made it a point of honor to *never* use guns against criminals. Still, the change in approach was clear, and while Julie acknowledged his mistake and never allowed his Batman to use a gun again, neither did he use robots, flying cameras, and other super-scientific paraphernalia that had glutted the Schiff stories. Nor were his adversaries the aliens and mad scientists Schiff had used so often; like the first story's villain, some of them were slightly ahead of the real world in their technology, as were Batman and Robin, Man, and the Frightful Four each made their appearances (among many others) that year. Basically, time was spent establishing the "Marvel Style" (best defined as a combination of glib characterization and visually-oriented plotting). This was coupled with replacing the mystery back-up stories in all the books with super-hero strips.

In 1964 there were three major super-hero publishing groups (DC, Marvel, and Charlton). As comics entered the decade's midway point, the number doubled, as costumed crimefighters became the craze. The American Comics Group entered the field with two badly designed heroes called Magic Man and Nemesis—each of whom would soon return to the limbo from which they were called. Harvey, the people best known for *CASPER, THE FRIENDLY GHOST* and *RICHIE RICH*, brought out a strange smorgasbord of original material and reprints. The original—and I use the word advisedly—characters included Bee Man, a man kidnapped and taken to the planet Venus by a race of alien bees; Magic Master, a genie who spent his time giving magic lessons to a little kid—and the Master was no relation to Magic Man, by

Even those who had never heard of Cap knew something big was up with this issue.
THE AVENGERS
CAPTAIN AMERICA
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but everything took place on a level much closer to that of the originally-conceived character.

Although it lasted for over five years and had several revival attempts, the *"Elongated Man"* strip always appealed to a more limited audience, and often seemed overly formulated to many readers. It did have its devoted fans, both because of the art and because of the light touch Gardner Fox gave it for greater contrast with the Batman lead stories. At times, however, neither the readers nor Fox himself seemed certain exactly how serious the various parts of the story were trying to be. Ironically, one college student described the *"Elongated Man"* feature as an "exquisite piece of tongue-and-cheek entertainment, certainly enjoyable for a much larger audience than just the children who take it seriously"--which was what William Dozier later claimed he was trying to do with his television adaptation of *BATMAN!* I doubt Gardner Fox was really trying for such a bifurcated audience, but his semi-humorous style certainly applied better to the Elongated Man than did the TV-inspired attempts to apply it to Batman even in the comics. Jack Cole's *PLASTIC MAN* had proved long ago the comic potential of powers like Ralph Dibny's, to which Fox added some additional touches like the Elongated Man's uncharacteristic (for a super-hero) vanity and desire for publicity. Even so, I can't escape the feeling that at least some of what the aforementioned reader acclaimed as brilliant satire--

(The Elongated Man is eavesdropping on the villains by elongating his ear down the chimney of their hideout. First crook tosses a lighted cigarette into the fireplace, striking Ralph's ear.

ELONGATED MAN: Owwww!

FIRST CROOK: What was that?

SECOND CROOK: An EAR--in the fireplace!

FIRST CROOK: He must be up on the roof!

--may actually have been intended seriously.

At any rate, the changes in Batman himself at this point were often more symbolic than real. The black bat insignia on his chest was now surrounded by a yellow moon, a new model of the Batmobile was introduced, and the Gotham City Police took to using a special "Hot-Line" to contact Batman rather than relying solely on the Bat-Signal. But other major changes included an almost complete turnover in supporting characters. Gone were all the other members of the "Batman Family": Batwoman, Bat-Girl, Bat-Mite, Alfred, Vicki Vale, et al, to be replaced by new ones like detective Patricia Powell, Dick Grayson's Aunt Harriet, and the Mystery Analysts of Gotham City. Of the old supportin characters, only Commissioner Gordon and regular villains like the Joker continued to appear. Most of the others were simply dropped and never mentioned again (except occasionally in *WORLD'S FINEST*) for over a decade, but Alfred, perhaps because the total disappearance of a butler needed some explanation, was actually killed off in the second "New Look" *DETECTIVE*. His death was apparently intended to be permanent, but the Dozier TV writers decided to keep *both* Alfred and his replacement, Aunt Harriet, as regulars. As a result, Alfred was brought back to life in the comic books in 1966, when it was revealed that he was temporarily insane and had become the villainous Outsider.

Other "New Look" innovations included the Alfred Memorial Foundation (re-christened the Wayne Foundation on TV, and in the comics after Alfred's return) which has continued to play an important part in Bruce Wayne's life to this day, and the frequent use of solo adventures of Batman or Robin, which paved the way for their eventual separation in 1969. The sales of the Batman titles did take the desired upward turn, so Julie Schwartz was permitted to retain editorship of both titles (except for a year when Archie Goodwin had *DETECTIVE*) until 1978. In 1970 he added *SUPERMAN* to his schedule when Mort Weisinger retired, and has handled DC's most famous character ever since--and all because, in 1964, he showed that he *did* know how to revitalize a fading superstar.●

© 1980 Tower Comics

Dynamo, the most popular of the T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents.

the way; Spy Man, with a bionic hand; and a hilarious spoof called *MIRACLES INCORPORATED*. The reprints were head and shoulders above the majority of this new material: Eisner's *SPIRIT*, Simon and Kirby's *FIGHTING AMERICAN*, and *THE BLACK CAT* all made reappearances in over sized books that would soon become collector's items. Speaking of the oversized collector's items, a new line appeared on the newsstands. They were sixty-eight page books featuring art by some of the best craftsmen in the business, working on characters named Dynamo, Noman, and Menthor. The book was *T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS*, and the publisher was Tower Comics. Tower adapted many of the elements into their own line that had already made Marvel successful: characterization, story continuity, and tight plotting. This "borrowing" of a tested comics approach made the Tower group the most successful of all the secondary publishers.

The Tower characters themselves were a strange mix. A United Nations spy group called T.H.U.N.D.E.R. (with a lot of periods a la *THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.*) captured various devices on a raid. Discovering that the devices would give their users super-powers, it was decided that instead of giving one agent all the gimmicks, they'd give each of a handful of picked agents one of the weapons. A trusted agent named Len Brown (named after one of Tower comics' scripters)

received the Thunderbelt which gave him super-strength and increased his molecular density, thereby rendering him relatively invulnerable. An undiscovered counterspy for T.H.U.N.D.E.R.'s enemy, the Warlord, was given a mental projection helmet and the code name Menthor. Ironically he found that he couldn't commit any criminal acts while wearing the device so he couldn't turn it over to the other side as he had originally planned. Finally, there was Noman. He was actually an android with the brain patterns of a brilliant, dying scientist who could transfer his brain patterns into any of a number of identical Noman replacement bodies. He was also given a cape of non-refractable material which, when activated, rendered him invisible. If his then-current body fell into mortal danger, he could more or less will his mind far away into a spare form. Of course, he ran through spare bodies like most people run through spare socks, which easily made him the most expensive of the three agents to keep in the field.

Meanwhile, back at DC, *"Adam Strange"* faded from *MYSTERY IN SPACE* as *"Ultra, the Multi-Alien"* took over and dragged the magazine down with him. Adam had been one of the classic early strips, continually well-written and illustrated and containing solid science fiction premises and solutions. After cancelling Adam, DC continued to experiment with characters revivals of old characters which had proven so successful with *THE FLASH* and *GREEN LANTERN*. A *Starman-Black Canary* team-up in *THE BRAVE AND THE BOLD* appeared opposite *SHOWCASE*'s *Hourman-Doctor Fate* match. Charlton Comics revamped its line by reviving *CAPTAIN ATOM* and introducing *SON OF VULCAN*, about whom the less said, the better. Marvel really began to shake up its line, too. The Avengers began a long-standing tradition by resigning *en masse* (for the first time) in issue #16, leaving Captain America in charge of a new team consisting entirely of ex-villains. Meanwhile, Cap's strip in *TALES OF SUSPENSE* was altered from a contemporary approach back to tales of the Star-Spangled Sentinel of Liberty and Bucky during WW II. At least he kept his

...IN THE KINGDOM OF THE CREEPS...

by Richard Howell

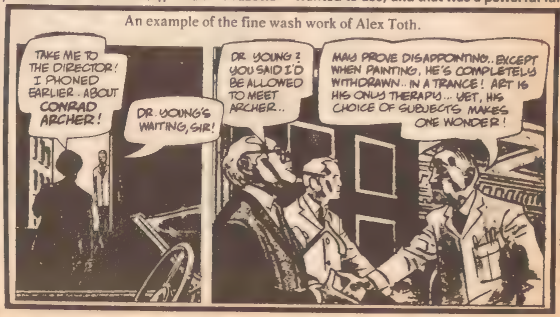
When the comic book market began to grow again in 1962, it also began to encourage format experimentation. National-DC had reinstituted the 80-page annual format, so the market was somewhat prepared for the larger, higher-priced comic magazines to come.

The first major comics-format experiment of the 1960s was Warren Publications' *CREEPY* magazine (1963). It was unique in that it featured real *horror* stories (in the EC tradition), photo-separated painted covers, and *black-and-white* inside art. Warren had formerly published a few horror movie *fumettis* (comics-style stories with word balloons, captions, etc., but using photographs instead of drawings), but this was his first real foray into straight comics publishing. To the new magazine's advantage, Warren and initial editor Russ Jones had recruited a prestigious selection of artists: Jack Davis (who designed the host figure "Uncle Creepy", as well as painted the first cover); Frank Frazetta (who did perhaps his last comics story in *CREEPY* #1, then inherited Davis' mantle as cover artist); and EC alumnae Joe Orlando, Reed Crandall, etc.

These artists illustrated six-to-eight page horror stories with werewolves, vampires, voodoo, cat-people, the walking dead, and many other subjects which were forbidden to color "horror" comics since the beginning of the Comics Code. This approach proved very popular. Despite some editorial unrest (within the first six months of publication, editor Jones was replaced by *CREEPY*'s primary writer Archie Goodwin--who also continued as primary writer), *CREEPY* grew in circulation until, in its second year of publication, Warren added a companion magazine, *EERIE*.

Under Goodwin, *CREEPY* and *EERIE* throved as they have yet to do since. Warren offered each artist freedom of original page size and which medium they wanted to use, and that was a powerful lure

An example of the fine wash work of Alex Toth.


TAKE ME TO THE DIRECTOR! I PHONED EARLIER ABOUT CONRAD ARCHER!
DR. YOUNG'S WAITING, SIR!
DR. YOUNG? I SAID I'D BE ALLOWED TO MEET ARCHER...
MAY PROVE DISAPPOINTING. EXCEPT WHEN PAINTING, HE'S COMPLETELY WITHDRAWN... IN A TRANCE! ART IS HIS ONLY THERAPY... YET, HIS CHOICE OF SUBJECTS MAKES ONE WONDER!

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to many artists tired of pen-and-ink. The artist lineup expanded significantly to include: Gene Colan, Gray Morrow, Wally Wood, Alex Toth, Angelo Torres, Steve Ditko, Dan Adkins, a young Neal Adams... the list goes on and on...

Goodwin's major achievement at Warren was commissioning stories (or, more often, writing them himself) for each of these varied artists which appealed to the favorite themes of each, and which stresses the best points of their artwork: Ditko did tremendous wash jobs for many magic-based stories like "Deep Ruby", "Spirit of the Thing", and "Where Sorcery Lives" (plus a detailed pen-and-ink job on a story which is rightfully museum material, "Collector's Edition" in *CREEPY* #10.), Alex Toth was assigned work which stressed his modern design facility, Colan (also working primarily in wash) for the tales which stressed mood and subtle facial reactions of the characters (as in the psychological drama of "Hatchet Man" or the Gothic-styled "The Changeling") Reed Crandall got some period pieces, Morrow and Adkins got science fiction, etc.

While most artists delivered only slightly greater work than was expected of them, one in particular was a revelation: Former Eisner assistant Jerry Grandinetti, working in ink and marker-wash on what were basically "old, dark house stories" unleashed a compelling vision of angles, jarring perspectives, and spontaneous montages which forced the story at the reader in a succession of manic, kinetic images. The best of these (including "Adventure of the German Student", "Cry Fear, Cry Phantom", "Voodoo Doll", and especially "House of Fiends" in *EERIE* #10) comprise a staggeringly intense and innovative body of work.

By 1965-6 the Warren line of magazines had reached a real peak of solid, craftsmanlike stories and inspired art—but their first failure had occurred: *BLAZING*

Grandinetti's stories proved to be some of the most memorable in the Warren Magazines. Partial credit must go to writer/editor/assigner Archie Goodwin.

FOR A TIME, TERRIFYING THOUGHTS KEYED HER NERVES, KEPT HER ON EDGE...BUT AT LAST THE TERROR OF HER SURROUNDINGS FLED, HER EYES GREW HEAVY...THEN, THERE WAS A SLIGHT SOUND AT THE DOOR...
CREEEEEAK!
J-JIM - IS THAT YOU?
CREEEAK!
MR. HOLLOWAY..?
NO DEAR GOD!
NO! NO! NO!
© 1980 Warren Publishing

strip. Both Giant-Man and the Human Torch lost theirs to The Sub Mariner and Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D., respectively. But it didn't matter if you lost your strip or not, you were still invited to the *FANTASTIC FOUR ANNUAL* #3, where Reed and Sue finally tied the knot with guest appearances of every single character in the Marvel Universe—at least on the cover. Right after the wedding, the F.F. met the Inhumans, Galactus, the Silver Surfer, and the Black Panther—it apparently was quite-a honeymoon. Thor had problems enough with Hercules on his hands (and holding Jane Foster's) and Daddy Odin on his back.

The Marvel Age of change and unexpected surprises was upon us and readers reacted with gusto. Marvel's popularity grew by leaps and bounds and M.M.M.S. chapters were organized at Cambridge and Oxford.

The *BATMAN* TV show brought massive changes to the comic scene in 1966. Editors saw that the American public liked its heroics with a laugh and so decided to give them what they wanted in print. The mighty Bard strode his way through the Archie super-hero books commenting on his goings-on, while Batman and the other DC characters became totally outlandish in terms of dialogue and abilities. The

worst modificationis were to the Justice Society of America. Apparently the 1940s heroes' weaponry wasn't exciting enough, so new, thoroughly improbable devices were drawn up. For example, the Sandman disposed of his gas gun and utilized a rod which could turn a handful of sand into a concrete wasll or a pair of glass handcuffs. Batman himself became the mirror of the TV version, complete with bad puns, psyhedelic visuals, and improbable, if not impossible plot twists.

Despite the camp craze, some things didn't change at DC. The year wouldn't have been complete without a couple of Golden Age revivals. The Spectre returned from the dead—literally—in the pages of *SHOWCASE* #60. Like the previous *SHOWCASE* revival, the Doctor Fate-Hourman team-up, this was the original character who had been exiled to comic book limbo for the duration of his original series' cancellation. When revived, however, he was less the avenging ghost concept than a magician who just happened to be dead. The other revival was more of a revamping; The stretchable sleuth of the 1940s, Plastic Man, slithered into the pages of *HOUSE OF MYSTERY'S "Dial 'H' for Hero"* series as one of Robby Reed's incarnations. Reader response was fairly good, so DC decided to give Plas his own book. Unfortunately, the only thing that the book had in common with the original character was the nam. Meanwhile another Golden Age survivor, *BLACKHAWK*, was going through his own tribulations. Following the trends, Blackhawk and his men first became operatives for a secret organization with a lot of initials (called G.E.O.R.G.E.), and then donned individual costumes to become super-heroes. The concept seems especially ludicrous when you consider taht all the Blackhawks were WW II veterans. Watching guys ostensibly in their later forties or early fifties running around in costumes seemed to add a rather hilarious aspect to the matter.

Over at Tower, things were anything but hilarious. One of the seminal members of the T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents, Menthor, died in issue #7 of the book. He was

COMBAT, a war comic (in the Kurtzman-E.C.tradition) with the same staff as *CREEPY* and *EERIE*, folded due to poor sales. Although it had featured material of equally as high quality as the horror titles, generally with downbeat, antiwar morals, it had not reached an audience large enough to support it. Political undercurrents at the time (during the Viet Nam War) did not particularly encourage *BLAZING COMBAT*' anti-agression stance, and perhaps that isolated it somewhat from the standard war comic buying market. At any rate, Warren's premiere war title was discontinued while his horror books continued to thrive. To some it was a disappointment, and a surprise. To E.C. holdovers it was the Same Old Story.

CREEPY and *EERIE*, however, suffered no ill effects from the cancellation, as they maintained high quality well into 1967—then things began to happen: Jim Warren's capitalization of the magazines began to waver somewhat, probably either due to his attempts to become less dependednt on his comics line (Captain Company, Warren's mail-order house, was a partial result of that attitude). The prestigious artists who had done so much to keep the magazines at the high level they then were found themselves with no assurance that their checks would be waiting for them upon each successive job's completion. Goodwin assumes that it was force of circumstance, and rejects the idea that Warren was purposely dealing in a less-than-professional manner with his staff. "Under those circumstances, though," says Goodwin, "I couldn't continue to assign work for which I could give no assurance of timely payment. I told Jim so and left the company. We are still on the best of terms with each other." (Indeed, Goodwin has continued to freelance for Warren frequently since his resignation, and for a short time in the middle Seventies, returned to his editorial post there.) *CREEPY* and *EERIE*, whose art staff had already begun to dissipate due to the books' new financial situation, lost more and more artists, then readers, and finally went all-reprint in '68-9. The Golden Age of Warren Magazines had ended.

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Familiar Ditko *DR. STRANGE* effects with less heroics and more menace. Warren stories were quite often genuinely frightening.

"But Warren's books did come back," reminds Goodwin, "and added a new look to American comic books when they did, with the Spanish artists. And don't forget that those books were the first black-and-white oversize comics to last more than a couple of issues—and now their format is an industry standard. Warren did all that, and he stuck with the books even when they weren't doing well. He got that format going and I think he deserves a lot of credit." ●

replaced almost immediately by a speedster named Lightning, but the shock of seeing one of the company's major characters getting killed off proved rather startling to fans. Even giving Dynamo and Noman their own books couldn't dispel the morbid feeling that reading Tower comics brought on after that.

Harvey's super-hero titles died a well deserved death. Well, actually at least *THE SPIRIT* didn't deserve it, but the bad and the good went together.

Dell Comics and M.F. Enterprises tied for the shortest-lived comics lines with each lasting just over nine months. Dell tried to create super-hero versions of popular monsters like Frankenstein, Dracula, and the Wolfman. To say that these may have been the worst of the Silver Age books would be charitable. M.F. Enterprises at least had the original Captain Marvel's creators, Otto Binder and C.C. Beck working on one of their books, *FATMAN, THE HUMAN FLYING SAUCER.* Even so, it only lasted for half a year.

The revamping at Charlton resulted in an influx of young writers and artists with new concepts. For example, *SON OF VULCAN* was altered into *PETER CANNON...THUNDERBOLT*, a hero based on pseudo-zen-yoga concepts which he used to give himself incredible psychic and physical powers. The *BLUE BEETLE* was completely redesigned with a new secret identity, weapons, and artist (steve Ditko). In fact, the first issue of the "New" *BLUE BEETLE* implied that the new version had eliminated the older version.

Marvel was having its own minor upheavals. Captain America's strip in *TALES OF SUSPENSE* reverted to a contemporary setting, and he finally met the ever-mysterious Agent 13 (Sharon Carter), sister of his WW II girlfriend. *TALES TO ASTONISH* ran parallel plotlines in *THE SUB-MARINER* and *THE HULK* strips, with cross-overs occuring almost every issue. More reprint books appeared and *MARVEL TALES* became a bi-monthly. *MARVEL COLLECTOR'S ITEM CLASSICS* and *FANTASY MASTERPIECES* made their debuts. The

THE GROUP WITH

Being a super-hero is no bed of roses. Dangers lurk around every corner, oftimes the reward for a job well done is just bare survival.

But how would you like to be a member of a group whose job is to protect mankind but whose members are hunted by the very society they have sworn to guard—simply because they were born with abilities beyond those of mortal men? If you think that such a life is for you, then you should belong to *THE X-MEN. THE X-MEN* were a team that, on the face of it, had everything going for it: a fancy headquarters, a dedicated, idealistic leader, members with amazing skills who were slowly learning how to cooperate with each other. Unfortunately, they were also... mutants.

People tended to mistrust what they couldn't understand. They heard the word "mutant" and images of deformed monsters would run through their minds. When beings like Magneto first appeared, proclaiming themselves superior to mere humans—and hence the logical choice to rule the masses of humanity—the concept of mutants as evil was reinforced.

In order to battle both the bad public relations and the evil mutants as well, Professor Charles Xavier organized a team of youngsters with exceptional talents into a well-integrated unit in which teamwork held priority over all else. The first lesson he drilled into them was simple: Defend each other—you have no one else. It was a credo the X-men would learn the hard way. Many would be the times in those early issues when the embattled heroes would have to flee for their lives, pursued by a human mob who considered them to be just as bad as the menaces the X-men had just fought.

Stan Lee and Jack Kirby knew how to take a basic idea and make it fresh by just a slight twist here and there. Having created

A typical "sad-thought-balloon" scene between the two star-crossed mutants

A FEW SECONDS LATER ...
EXCELLENT, JEAN! YOU'VE REFINED YOUR POWER TO AN ALMOST UNBELIEVABLE DEGREE!
ALMOST AS UNBELIEVABLE AS YOUR BEAUTY, WHICH LEAVES ME BREATHLESS.
THANK YOU, SCOTT!
BUT TO YOU, I'LL NEVER BE ANYTHING MORE THAN MARVEL GIRL!
TERRIFIC, JEAN! IF YOU HAD ICE POWER, YOU'D BE PERFECT!
I'VE GOT TO CHANGE THE SUBJECT. WHEN SHE STANDS THIS CLOSE TO ME, I FORGET EVERYTHING BUT MY DESIRE TO REACH OUT...TO EMBRACE HER.
BY THE WAY, WHERE'S WARREN? I DON'T SEE HIM HERE
THAT'S RIGHT! HE HASN'T BEEN HERE
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SOMETHING X-TRA

-Brian Boerner

super-hero groups that operated out of midtown Manhattan and had no secret identities (*THE FANTASTIC FOUR*), and a group made up of famous individual heroes who had nothing in common (*THE AVENGERS*), they set about finding out what *else* could be done with the super-group format. The duo decided to play with the old misunderstood-hero-pursued-by-the-authorities routine. After all, it was working fantastically well with *SPIDER-MAN* and *THE HULK*. All they needed was a reason for the persecution, and they found one in the most mindless bias they could think of: blind prejudice. People fear and despise anything or anyone who is different from them. Lee and Kirby created a team of super-heroes who were supected by the public at every turn of being in league with the menaces from which they were protecting them. As a result, the X-men had few outside friends. With so little contact beyond the school, the relationships inside the team became the focal point of the book. With little in the way of a supporting cast, the X-men themselves received extensive character development. The central figure was, of course, Professor X, a father figure and a telepath. He was the team's leader and benefactor. His right-hand man, Scott "Cyclops" Summers, had optic beams which could apply great force against any object. Scott also had what was almost a martyr complex, believing that he was cursed by his powers and that there was nothing he could do except be an outcast. He felt that he had no right to endanger others with his power, especially his beloved Jean "Marvel Girl" Grey, who possessed great telekinetic powers. Scott and Jean worshipped each other from afar, each afraid to voice what they felt for each other.

The Angel (Warren Worthington III, who had wings and could fly), at one point made a play for Jean and created a triangle between the three of them.

While Lee was creating the dialogue for this super-hero soap opera, Jack Kirby plotted and illustrated his way through the tales with his usual aplomb—handling a tender moment between Scott and Jean or an attack by a fifty-foot Sentinel with equal ease. Together, Lee and Kirby created the basis for the success of *THE X-MEN* within the first 18 issues: The Scott-Jean relationship, the origin of Professor X's "brother", Cain (Juggernaut) Marko, the everpresent Sentinels, mankind's distrust of mutants, and, of course, Magneto and his Brotherhood of Evil Mutants. All of these elements first saw the light of day during the Lee-Kirby reign. They laid such imaginative groundwork that their successors have done little else than profit from it since. ●

Mutant vs. Mutant revisited. The Brotherhood were practically the book's supporting cast in those days.

original Human Torch re-emerged in the pages of *FANTASTIC FOUR ANNUAL #4* to provide even more continuity problems between the old Timely books and the Marvel universe. Poor Peter Parker finally graduated from High School only to lose his artist (and plotter), Steve Ditko, a couple of months later. Ditko, one of Marvel's top three artists, decided to move on to greener pastures. Replacements would be found for him on *SPIDER-MAN* and *DOCTOR STRANGE* in the persons of John Romita and Bill Everett, respectively, but the damage was done. The original Marvel team—the Marvel Bullpen family—had started to break up. Even to this day *SPIDER-MAN* still gets "Bring back Steve Ditko" letters. Things would never be the same for the fans.

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NEXT ISSUE: THE CONCLUSION OF "THE SILVER AGE OF COMICS!!"

Good character writing is a delicate combination of science and intuition. To establish a solid personality base for each character, the character must be fully examined, planned, and understood before he or she is introduced. This scientific approach creates the character's appearance of comfortable predictableness--the verisimilitude of the thoughts and actions of a real person, and the warm familiar feeling of a known quantity acting "in character". Without this premeditated analysis, the character will flail about for some time after his/her introduction before a steady buildup of initially unrelated actions will establish his/her personality base by default. On the other hand, the writer must understand human nature sufficiently to know that people can act on impulse, and that unremitting familiarity can often produce a character who is *so* predictable that he/she borders on tediousness. To reduce a character to a set of responses and attitudes places them at the level of preprogrammed automatons, and denies them the spontaneous latitude that real people--and thus "real" characters--possess. Any good character writer should artfully present characters who display behavior patterns familiar enough to be instantly recognizable and distinguishable from the rest of the cast, yet who still evidence the capacity to act in a surprising, ultimately humanly variant manner. (It goes without saying, naturally, that any writer who utilizes the "Surprising Action Clause" in a manner to explain away uncharacteristic actions is misusing it--and thus a poor character writer.) Any comics writer who produces even a handful of full-blown, vital characters such as have these characteristics is a rarity. A writer who composes and conducts a full cast of them is a treasure.

One such asset to the arts is Milton Caniff, creator/writer/artist/impresario of *TERRY AND THE PIRATES* (1934-1946), and presently *STEVE CANYON* (1947-present). Although Caniff's contributions to the growth of the comics medium range from his research techniques to his impressionist art style, his greatest strength is probably his adept, psychologically informed characterizations. Although both *CANYON* and *TERRY* offer a bevy of bountiful examples for analysis, this article will restrict itself—for space reasons—to the cast of *TERRY*. For other reasons, this essay will further restrict itself to that of Caniff's work in the *TERRY* strip which directly confronts what has been called the ultimate test for a male writer--the examination and presentation of a fully-deliniated cast of *female* characters. And that's why this article is called...

WOMEN in TERRY AND THE Pirates

by Richard Howell

by MILTON CANIFF

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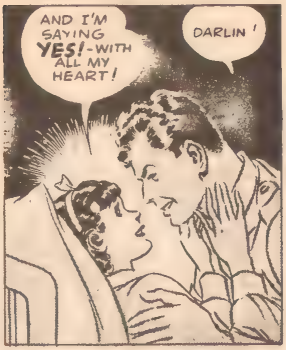
During their years in China, *TERRY*'s wayfarer protagonists, Pat Ryan and Terry Lee, certainly did encounter a sufficient number of intriguing females for Caniff's characterization prowess to be extended to its fullest. Their first distaff adjunct was one Dale Scott, who, with her father, rented a steamboat along the "West River." Dale was outwardly everything an adventure-strip heroine should have been (and had been up until then), but for all her feistiness and determination, she lacked any indivuduality--some distinguishing motivation or mannerism that would ensure some interest in her. Dale didn't have it.

1. Normandie Drake



The strip's second leading lady was rather more successful. She was Normandie Drake, the spoiled and temperamental neice of Draco Corporation's Chauncey Drake. Originally escorted by the aptly-named Count Dimitri Phoneeski, Normandie's mixed reaction to young Terry's retrieval of her purse were enough to interest the reader in searching out her basic motivations under her snobbish affectations.

DMITRI, YOU WERE RATHER UNKIND TO THAT BOY WHO RECOVERED MY PURSE!-I THOUGHT HE WAS VERY NICE ABOUT IT!
COME, COME, MY DEAR!-HE PROBABLY RECOGNIZED YOU AND HOPED TO PUT YOU IN HIS DEBT!- BUT I DISMISSED HIM DIDN'T I?-AH INDEED YES! -QUITE!
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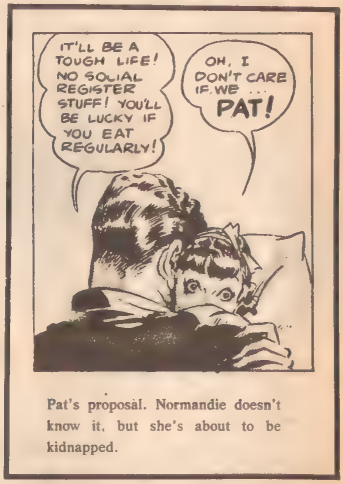
As the first adventure progressed, Normandie's innate intelligence and heroism became more and more prominent. By her early betrayal of her better nature, Normandie quickly interested the readers in her eventual re-evaluation of Pat and Terry, and her redemption as a "democratic" human being. (This was where Caniff's Normandie succeeded where his Dale Scott failed: By introducing Normandie with a collection of somewhat adverse personality traits, he gave the reader the chance to see her character *progress* during the story.)

When Normandie, Pat, Connie, Terry, Chauncey, and a few loyal crewmen were shipwrecked by Phoneeski, the natural preeminence of Pat Ryan became more apparent to everyone. Normandie, still acting the spoiled rich girl, chafed at her newfound subservience and wandered off into the island, where she was apprehended by Phoneeski and his gang of pirates. During the course of Normandie's rescue, she was called on to show great fortitude and judgement, and she succeeded in doing so. Tested by danger, she emerged a better woman--especially in the eyes of Pat Ryan. Although Pat fought against his attatchment to a society belle, by the end of the subsequent adventure in the Draco mines (*THE NORMANDIE AFFAIR*, in the Nostalgia Books *TERRY* series), neither he nor Normandie could deny their mutual longing. The wedding was arranged--even while Normandie was still convalescing from a bullet



Pat's proposal. Normandie doesn't know it, but she's about to be kidnapped.

wound--but Normandie's class-conscious Aunt Augusta came to China to intercede and prevent her neice from the same social mistake (and earning the same social ostracism) as she herself had done when she married "an adventurer" (Chauncey). Augusta Drake virtually kidnapped her neice back to America, leaving Pat despondent and bitter.

Naturally, Normandie returned to the strip, albeit a year later. Caniff, though, was never interested in static characters and each reappearance of each major supporting character marked a change in his/her life. When Normandie reappeared, she was married to Anthony Sandhurst, a cowardly blackguard, to be sure, but recommended by Aunt Augusta as being "from the best families." As Pat, Terry, and Connie came into conflict with Sandhurst (over his high-handed treatment of them and the Draco mine employees) even before the identity of Mrs. Sandhurst was revealed, there was little chance of Pat's sedate acceptance of things as they were. Our heroes rescued Sandhurst from marauding Mongols, only to return to civilization and find charges of insurrection and alienation of affections pressed against them by--yep--the vindictive Sandhurst. Ultimately, Normandie cast the deciding vote in the trial by appearing in time to testify for Pat, although she was both pregnant and exhausted from her escape from her own house (in which she had been locked by you-know-who). Sandhurst escaped (to Japan, as was revealed later), and Pat once again tried to convince Normandie to run away with him. Between visits, however, our heroes were kidnapped again, and Normandie was eventually reunited with her husband.

In Normandie's third and last appearance in *TERRY*(1942), Pat aided her escape (with her husband and their daughter Merrily) from the bombing of Hong Kong. In the course of their odyssey, Sandhurst's complicity with the Japanese became evident to all, and Pat's suit might have succeeded, but for their

A family portrait circa 1943. Normandie and Merrily are in the top row, to the right of the Wingates. Keil is before Stan Wingate, and Dude Hennick stands behind Terry. To the right of Burma is the cowardly Tony Sandhurst.

choice of refuges (they stayed with the Dragon Lady and her guerrillas). Pat and Normandie were separated during a bombing raid on the DL's headquarters, and Normandie and Merrily were eventually found, treated, and sent home by the American Red Cross. Normandie was not seen again.

Obviously, the strongest plot point in each of Normandie Drake Sandhurst's reappearances was the unresolved romance between her and Pat Ryan. Caniff's editor, Colonel Patterson, must have anticipated the sort of reader involvement that could arise from such an ongoing situation, since one of the books he gave Caniff for reference for *TERRY* was *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*. Normandie's place in the epic, though, is less easy to pinpoint: Initially, her romance with Pat was a challenge to the artifice of class-consciousness (which was still very prevalent in 1935), and Sandhurst's atrophied morals seemed to support Normandie's original choice of Pat and condemn the caste system. However, when World War II began, much of the pettiness and posing of the war against infiltration of the upper crust was, if not forgotten, at least far less a part of the national consciousness. It would no longer do for Sandhurst to possess *only* a full selection of personality drawbacks, he had to also be a Japanese collaborator. The class difference between Normandie and Pat faded into insignificance, and the continual spectre of Sandhurst was the only obstacle to their long-denied consummation. (Sandhurst remained alive throughout Caniff's tenure on *TERRY*, and his final appearance (1947) postdates Normandie's.

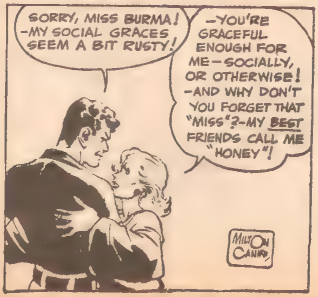
The character of Normandie Drake, however, had become dated by 1942, and could not be as wholeheartedly accepted by either the public or the author as the perfect mate for *TERRY*'s original leading man. Normandie was very much a product of her times, and lacked sufficient individualism to sustain interest after the original conflict surrounding her had changed. *TERRY* readers loved to see two-fisted adventurer Pat Ryan come to grips with smug proponents of the economic caste system, but they doubtless would balk somewhat as their hero running off with some upper-class matron. One course was heroic, the other--however justified--was sordid. Couple this with the substantially decreased amount of space given in *TERRY* to Pat

"MRS. ANTHONY MERRILL SANDHURST REQUESTS THE PLEASURE OF YOUR COMPANY AT THE BREAKING OF HER HEART"...HOW CAN I BEAR MEETING PAT FACE TO FACE?- IF I'M A SINNER I HAVE MY PURGATORY TO FACE NOW- AND I'M AFRAID!

Ryan adventures (in favor of the exploits of the by-then-adult Terry Lee), and the apparent telescoping of Normandie's drives to the strictly maternal (during the 1942 sequence, Normandie's paramount--almost only--concern was for the safety of her daughter Merrily), Mrs. Sandhurst's exclusion from *TERRY* seemed a natural progress.

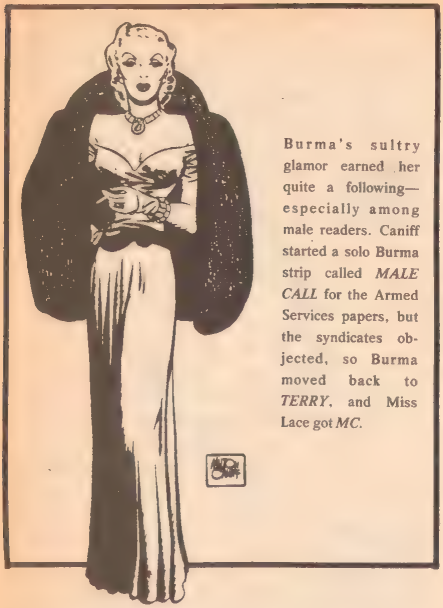
In final analysis, then, Normandie Drake was, although a major step forward from Dale Scott, still a limited personality. She was a successful heroine in that when the exotic adventure sequences got rought (as in the Draco Mine episode), she could withstand considerable adversity. When the pressure came from sources closer to home, however, as with her aunt's ill-motivated manipulations or her "rightful" loyalty to her unsalvageable husband, Normandie buckled under. This conditional weakness was the undoing of her (and Pat's) happiness.

In many respects she was a tragic figure in *TERRY*, and part of that tragedy was that for her to stay in character, her character was outgrown by the strip itself.


SORRY, MISS BURMA! -MY SOCIAL GRACES SEEM A BIT RUSTY!
-YOU'RE GRACEFUL ENOUGH FOR ME--SOCIALLY, OR OTHERWISE! -AND WHY DON'T YOU FORGET THAT "MISS"?-MY BEST FRIENDS CALL ME "HONEY"!
MISS ON CAMPUS

2. Burma

Immediately following the initial Normandie Drake adventure was the story which showcased the first appearance of Burma, one of the great characters of comic strips. After escaping from a pirate ship run by a Captain Judas, our heroes found themselves stranded on an island with Burma, a mysterious, sultry blonde. She took them into her (quite comfortable) two-story abode (ex-

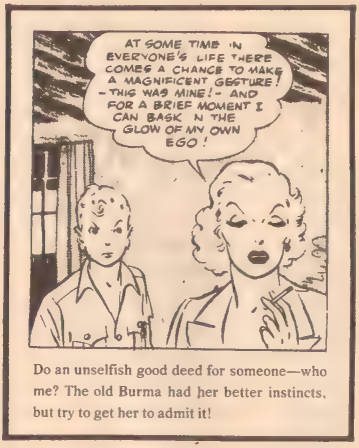


Burma's sultry glamor earned her quite a following—especially among male readers. Caniff started a solo Burma strip called *MALE CALL* for the Armed Services papers, but the syndicates objected, so Burma moved back to *TERRY*, and Miss Lace got *MC*.

cept for Burma and her servants, the island was deserted), and made them feel quite at home. Naturally, she fell for Pat Ryan, although their initial clinch was disturbed by Burma's "business partner", Captain Judas. A struggle and escape led Pat, Terry, Connie, and Burma (Burma carrying a suitcase of stolen jewels from Judas) to another island—this one a British outpost—where they met Mr. and Mrs. Wingate, a somewhat subdued couple who offered them shelter. The plot became a little too complex to recount here, but basically Burma became disenchanted with Pat's efforts to get her to turn the jewels over to the authorities, and vamped Stan Wingate so she would have an ally. An outbreak of the plague undercut the domestic melodrama which ensued, and Burma, prompted by Terry, sacrificed her jewels to save Mrs. Wingate from being burned to death by the aggrieved natives. That put Inspector Gwynne (of "Piracy Investigation") on her trail, and he stayed on it practically up until Caniff's last week on the strip.

Burma returned to Pat's and Terry's lives (separately or together) many times, always running from the police, and almost always in another identity: She wore a black wig in 1937; masqueraded as Terry's sister Burmadine Lee in 1938; in 1940 she was Madame Lustre, the mistress of the sadistic Nazi, Keil, until Terry became Keil's pawn; she painted her skin, dyed her hair, and wiggled her way into the dancing shoes of Madame Shoo-Shoo in 1944; later that year (a blonde again, and with glasses), the posed as Cornelia Cheddo, Willow Belinda's British tutor; only at the end of 1946 was she seen openly as Burma, and that was when Gwynne finally caught up to her.

Burma was a study in complexities. From what little Caniff revealed of her background, we know that she led an up-an-down existence in America (Burma to Judas, 1936: "Just because I was down and out when I met you doesn't mean I haven't had plenty.") and was hardened by her rough life. She apparently had no compunctions about serving as Judas' fence for the jewelry he and his pirates would steal from unwary yachters, and was willing to sacrifice Pat, Terry, and Connie to the law to save her own skin--initially. However, in every instance when the proverbial chips were down, Burma acted in a selfless, even heroic manner: She saved Mrs Wingate, she exposed herself to enemy fighters to save Chinese children from a bombing raid, she tried to save her "enemy", Raven Sherman from Captain Judas, and she refused to expose Col Wolff to the waiting Nazi informants (all 1941). Even if Burma was originally a somewhat bitter, hard-bitten woman, her better instincts were easily


AT SOME TIME IN EVERYONE'S LIFE THERE COMES A CHANCE TO MAKE A MAGNIFICENT GESTURE! - THIS WAS MINE! - AND FOR A BRIEF MOMENT I CAN BASK N THE GLOW OF MY OWN EGO!

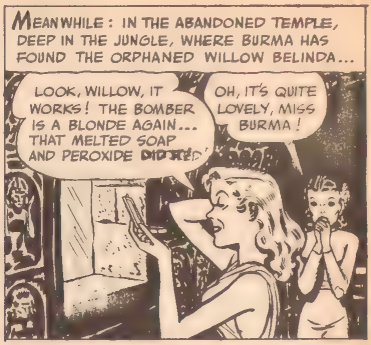
Do an unselfish good deed for someone—who me? The old Burma had her better instincts, but try to get her to admit it!

encouraged. She explains the change herself as having been in the company of good people like our heroes ("[Terry's] a good kid...Sorta reminded me of nice clean things I had forgotten existed" (5/11/41) and later "This is what I get for associating with people like Terry Lee. Now I've got a conscience on my hands..." (9/7/41)), but such major changes in personality could scarcely arise from several short-term encounters, even with Pat and Terry. Burma clearly was a noble woman who was led by circumstance into a life of dissolution and dishonesty, and who was not self-assured enough to escape it alone. In her earlier appearances, she gravitates towards shady-but-comfortable existences (Judas' henchwoman, Keil's mistress), but as her

character progressed, she chose progressively more morally acceptable—and less comfortable—identities: a native dancer earning a meager living, a tutor/chaperone to a frightened 17-year-old orphan girl, and a houseguest of one of Terry's female war acquaintances.

Several constants in Burma's personality prevented her from ever being happy where she was, though, even over-and-above her flight from Inspector Gwynne. She was living by her looks, annd in her opinion, she had nothing else to offer. This was clearly indicated by both her numerous off-hand comments concerning her own stupidity ("I'm not so good at spelling, but I think I can manage this one word." This is while she writes 'HELP' in flour on top of a temple where she and Willow are escaping from a marauding ape (1944)), her near constant referral to herself in the second person ("Who'd'a ever thought that Burma would wind up in a mess like this?"), and most importantly, her intense, automatic dislike of any woman she thought was more desirable than her—either due to looks or brains. Burma and the Dragon Lady despised each other, and neither was too shy to contain it. (Burma: 'That flesh-tinted icicle is so two-faced she never gets lonesome. If she ever married, her husband would probably sue *her* for alienation of her own affections." (1938)) Burma had a similarly low opinion of the petty, scheming Drusilla Crail, and tried to vamp Crail's "intended", Reginald Smythe-Heatherstone, to save him from her (in an interesting reverse-motivation of the Stan Wingate story). The real fireworks began when Burma met Raven Sherman, a rather plain, repressed woman who nonetheless was a college-educated society leader—and thus Burma's superior by far (or so thought Burma). These two clashed continually: over Raven's boyfriend Dude Hennick's attraction to the gorgeous blonde (and Raven's refusal to let her hair down and admit it to either Burma or Duke), over Burma's criminal ex-connections (Judas) appearing again, this time to threaten Raven's beloved war orphan charges; and especially over Raven's undeniable intellectual superiority. Burma took disproportionate (but characteristic) offense at Raven's suggestion of playing a harmless quiz game (with Terry and Duke) (Burma: "You mean *Raven* gets a point for every one I *don't* answer." 1941)). Burma even clashed with the somber Jane Allen over the attentions of the grown-up Terry in 1946. The only female with whom Burma did get along with was young Willow Belinda, who looked on the older, worldly woman as her guide and teacher. Yet even they clashed slightly over Terry, until the British authorities caught up with her again, leaving Willow with a clear field.

Perhaps the best indicator of Burma's personality was how she responded to the man who treated her with respect and compassion: Terry Lee. Although she was several years older than Terry, as he approached adulthood (and she for all intents remained the same age), Burma began to find more pleasure in the attentions of the young man who had confessed his love for her in their second adventure together (in 1938), and who had saved her life on many occasions. In the Keil/Colonel Wolff


MEANWHILE: IN THE ABANDONED TEMPLE, DEEP IN THE JUNGLE, WHERE BURMA HAS FOUND THE ORPHANED WILLOW BELINDA...
LOOK, WILLOW, IT WORKS! THE BOMBER IS A BLONDE AGAIN... THAT MELTED SOAP AND PEROXIDE DID IT!
OH, IT'S QUITE LOVELY, MISS BURMA!

Teacher and Pupil: Burma maintained her looks like a speculator guarding his investment capital—and she always got a return! To Willow about her makeup kit: "You'll be surprised how often they take the place of a passport."

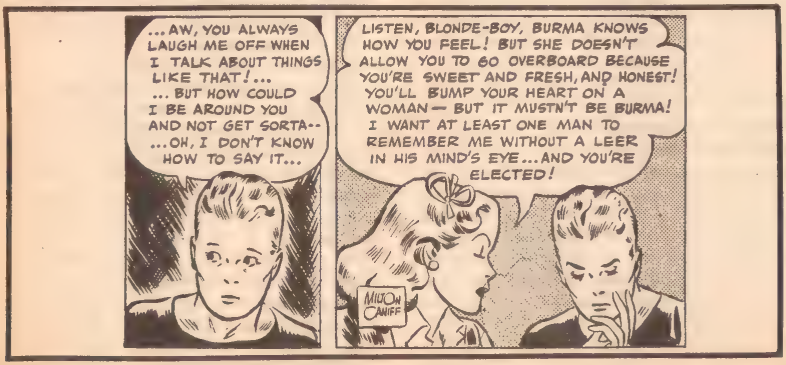
adventure, Terry and Burma were alone in a hostile environment against many enemies, and grew to depend on each other quite a bit. In the Raven Sherman story, Burma openly encouraged Terry's affections ("You're old enough to make women sit up and take notice...Speak up like you've got something to sell." (7/27/41))although she obviously had reservations about mentally putting him in the same class with her other "lovers", and told him so. This was more the action of a woman who wanted to preserve the difference, the "purity" of the worshipful attention she had gotten from Terry, rather than the coquettishness of a vain, manipulatory flirt. With Burma's past history, it was easy to see why she would associate her sex-oriented relationships with the more degrading aspects of her life. Her attachment to Terry was strong enough that it was *his* disapproval over her treatment of Raven that finally drove her off on her own again (right into Judas' clutches), and her consideration of his position was the main impetus for her rebelling against Judas' schemes (8/41). When Terry rescued her from Singh-singh's mountain hideaway (1944), they finally became lovers in the full sense of the word—although Terry characteristically assumed that Burma's gratitude was nothing more than that, and he was soon again involved with relationships he felt were more in his "league." When Burma reappeared in 1946, she was in open competition with Jane Allen over who got to "ride side-saddle on [Terry's] free knee." (12/13/46), and was seemingly quite changed and serious about it—although she nonetheless did manage to stage her seductions

YOU'RE SWEET, TERRY — BUT I FORGOT... I WAS GOING TO RACK YOU BACK FOR GIVING WILLOW BELINDA STAR DUST IN THE EYES!
IF I WERE DUMB ENOUGH TO THINK YOU WERE JEALOUS OF WILLOW, I'D BE FLATTERED... BUT WHY KID MYSELF?... I'M NOT IN YOUR LEAGUE!
HEY, MISTER, DON'T SELL YOUR OLD SIDE-KICK DOWN THE RIVER! — AFTER ALL WE'VE BEEN THROUGH, WE HAVE A SORT OF UNDERSTANDING, DON'T WE?
AW, SURE...

with her classic "bad girl" touch. The difference in age between Burma and Terry seemed to have faded away, as Burma once accused the younger-but-less-adventurous Jane Allen of being "too old" for Terry. She must have realized that her adventurous life was what had attracted the younger man to her, not dates on a calendar. Long after he had left the strip, Caniff had revealed that he had at one time intended for Pat Ryan to marry Burma. In the middle 1940s, however, there seemed to be no doubt that it was Terry she had the most to offer (and vice versa).

Caniff presented this fascinating woman through a variety of techniques—all of which can be loosely grouped under the heading "theatrical." Burma more than any other character in the Caniff stable voiced her thoughts whenever she had them, talked to herself frequently, talked *about* herself to herself frequently (with her second-person "I know who's losing this war—it's Burma" fixation), commented on the ongoing situation in knowing, caption-like phrases, and even had a "theme song" (The St. Louis Blues) which always heralded her return to the continuity. In part this reflected Caniff's own early stage experience, and it in part resulted from Burma's original model: Joan Crawford in the movie of Somerset Maugham's *RAIN*. (Caniff frequently used model for character studies: Normandie Drake was clearly based on Claudette Colbert, and Sandhurst on Charles Laughton.) Burma was wry, agressive, worldly-wise, and talkative—a scripter's dream character. She was also mysterious and sexy (which made her a favorite among the male readers) as well as being sympathetic and intelligent (which encouraged support from *TERRY*'s many female fans). She also had a distinctive speaking style, a little-mentioned but clearly-conceived system of motivations, and a personality with one interminably-useful fatal flaw: insecurity. Burma was a favorite of all the readers (and Terry himself) but a magnet for trouble. She was a constant source of story material and character conflicts, as well as being a near-perfect vehicle for showcasing them both for the reader. It would be extremely difficult to think of any other character, man or woman, past or present, comic book or comic strip, to match the mysterious Miss Burma in either the fascinating complexity of her characterization or in the expertise and empathy with which Caniff delivered it...

Except for the DRAGON LADY!


...AW, YOU ALWAYS LAUGH ME OFF WHEN I TALK ABOUT THINGS LIKE THAT!... ... BUT HOW COULD I BE AROUND YOU AND NOT GET SORTA-- ...OH, I DON'T KNOW HOW TO SAY IT...
LISTEN, BLONDE-BOY, BURMA KNOWS HOW YOU FEEL! BUT SHE DOESN'T ALLOW YOU TO GO OVERBOARD BECAUSE YOU'RE SWEET AND FRESH, AND HONEST! YOU'LL BUMP YOUR HEART ON A WOMAN — BUT IT MUSTN'T BE BURMA! I WANT AT LEAST ONE MAN TO REMEMBER ME WITHOUT A LEER IN HIS MIND'S EYE... AND YOU'RE ELECTED!
MILTON CANIFF

NEXT ISSUE: WOMEN IN TERRY continues with April Kane, the Scarlett O'Hara of World War II; and the woman who came to embody a cultural archetype, The Dragon Lady!!

REALITY AS IMAGINATION: A LOOK AT MCGREGOR AND ROGERS' "DETECTIVES, INC."

by Peter Gillis

Comic books for a long time now have been thought of, appreciated, and even defended principally as works of the imagination. I don't know why this is. Perhaps it has something to do with the ease with which fantastic figures and scenes are created by the artist's pencil, or perhaps it's a 20th century obsession with the future and the unknown. The fact is, the dominant form of comic books has always stressed the exotic, the futuristic, the magical, and the grotesque. And since I was a kid, I've always been drawn to comics for precisely those flights of imagination, flights which, often, I couldn't get anywhere else.

So what's the use of a comic in a contemporary setting, with no exotic elements (except for those souls who find New York City or any big city 'exotic'), which could, without a big special effects budget, be translated to a TV or movie screen, or even worse, which one could see happening in real life in front of one's eyes?

I mean, where's the imagination?

DETECTIVES, INC. is a smooth, beautifully-told story. Don McGregor, who has tended to write comics using a lot of copy, has done most of the book without a single caption. His and Marshall Rogers' experiments in story-telling technique, which are often quite unusual and even daring, never impeded the story flow (at least for me). The story-line never dragged: the two creators know when to switch tempos, when to advance the plot, and when to delve into characterization. Roger's depiction of scenes and characters always leans to the real: the settings in *DETECTIVES* are never stylized or romanticized, and he peoples the strip with women with flabby thighs and non-gorgeous faces, un-cute kids, and plain men: there's not a Modesty Blaise or Captain America in the bunch. (Not even a Bruce Wayne). Even (or especially) with respect to the potentially sensational aspect of the story (Lesbian love). It is handled with a balance and a lack of exaggeration, one way or another, to the point that it seemed as though I'd been reading comics stories about homosexual women for years, and there was nothing outrageous about it. In short, it felt real.

All of which still doesn't answer my question—where's the imagination? Why read it when it doesn't have super-heroes or magic swords or ESP or fancy hardware? Why do such a book?

I think the answer can be summed up in one ambiguous, enigmatic word: drama. *DETECTIVES, INC.* is a dramatic book: it is tense and powerful and draws one into its action. And it does so without using any of the elements I just mentioned as attractive. It is easy to be attracted to a Captain America or a Superman, because he is a dream, an ideal. It is less easy to become attracted to a human being, and this is one of the things that Don McGregor and Marshall Rogers do here: they assert (and *show*) that two detectives, a divorced wife, two lovers separated by death from their common object of passion, and others, can be just as exciting, as powerful, as dramatic an ensemble as The Avengers or The Justice League of America.

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This dramatization of real life is a very difficult thing to pull off in any medium. In movies, a director will often substitute the mass destruction of property or a car chase for a focus on real life or substitute the glamor of well-known movie stars for interesting characters. In 'mainstream' fiction, writers will substitute depictions of wealth and power for the same. Comics often found costumes and powers and intergalactic wars easier than taking grey ol' day-to-day existence and revitalizing, re-imagining it. Will Eisner, in *THE SPIRIT*, did consistently manage to take real-life, off-the-street characters and construct compelling stories involving them through a unique combination of carefully-controlled caricature and a flair for storytelling that is called "cinematic" only for lack of a better term. And in its own way, though the tone and approach (not to mention length) differ greatly, *DETECTIVES* achieves, I think, similar ends.

McGregor's script and Rogers' art do not go in for the almost

romantic exaggeration that Eisner used: Rogers' faces never contort themselves beyond realistic limits, and McGregor uses none of the ironic coincedences that are a short story writer's stock-in-trade (the victim of a gangster's rub-out turns out to be a boyhood pal (or bully), the gun used to kill one person ends up killing the killer, and so on.) Instead, the book borders on atmosphere and ironic parallelism without losing its realistic base, and manages to convey the drama while still saying "this could happen in front of you—tomorrow."

There are almost-parallels throughout the story. The most obvious is portrayed graphically in the prologue to the book, which has two story-lines (the Detectives' run-in with a youth gang, and the hit-and-run murder of the woman about whom the rest of the story revolves) told at the same time, both of which end in death (and in the same panel--a technique which I never would have believed could work if I hadn't seen it, but which Rogers succeeds at magnificently). But there is no irony here: death is the only thing that holds these two incidents together.

Another near-parallel is the relationship between the two male detectives (characterized by the girlfriend of one as "love") and the Lesbian relationship between the murder victim and her fellow midwife. Again, the classic artistic simplicity of the parallel is violated many times: the male-male relationship is not homosexual, the female-female relationship is discovered to have been less firm than it seemed at first (and ultimately shakier than the detectives' bond), and there is even a tentative, fragile but genuine contact between one side of the 'mirror' and the other. Although there is enough there to make one think about parallels, the characters are ultimately vindicated as something beyond figures in a mirror, and the bonds between them are confirmed as real things, not lines in a diagram.

In a way, Rogers' meticulous art serves a similar purpose: it is realistic enough that, for the most part, the book could have been done with photographs (except for one or two panels, which I will get to.) But in rendering the scenes so finely, Rogers conveys an impression of fascinated attention to those details: a photograph merely includes them automatically. By putting in every rock and bottle-cap, Rogers gives these details importance—and yet they still remain rocks and bottle-caps. We're drawn to Rogers' details and yet they aren't made to be more than they are.

And finally, at the climax of the book, when Don and Marshall just for a second, step beyond the bounds of even-handed, smooth, realistic depiction:when one of the detectives confronts an onrushing car, and it becomes a visual metaphor for the boy he killed at the beginning of the book; when the other detective fights in the surf with the murderer, shouting and swinging in near-super-hero fashion—those effects hit me with an impact that they never would have had in a book loaded with fantastic trappings. Here, they were devastating.

I'm not saying that *DETECTIVES, INC.* is the way comics should be done, or that super-heroes, sf, and fantasy are cop-outs—I enjoy those kinds of books too much to ever say that. But *DETECTIVES, INC.* is a very special book that manages to imagine the real world in a particularly striking way, and I'm awfully glad that Don McGregor and Marshall Rogers wrote and drew it, and that Eclipse Enterprises published it.

(And I didn't even mention *I SPY* once in the whole review!)

continued
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fortunately, absurd. The difference lies in the craft, awareness, and committiment of the creative teams to take portrayals of marriage, etc., beyond the happily-ever-after descent into dismal domesticity of which, in comics, it is commonly conceived. Aside from these several exceptions, little has been done to change the undesirable status of marriage in the medium, and probably because of the widespread negative preconceptions against it. After all, if one is convinced he/she won't have any fun mountain-climbing, yet is forced to go, he/she will have a bad attitude about it, put little effort into the enterprise, and ultimately will fall far short of the enjoyment he/she might possibly have gotten from the experience (and probably fall while climbing to boot!!) Like mountain-climbing, artistic endeavor and marriage both require consistent insight and effort to succeed—*not* a predisposition towards either project's lack of inherent worth. With the fine efforts of Steve Gerber (primarily responsible for the DD/BW and Valkyrie/Jack Norriss couplings), Steve Englehart (Doctor Strange/Clea, Wanda/Vision, the Hawks), and the Lee/Kirby team (or uncut Kirby, i.e. Mr. Miracle and Big Barda), among too few others, the ill-conceived caveat inhibiting the matings of super-heroes has been proven purposeless.

Outside of comic books, such successful projects as *STEVE CANYON* or *ON STAGE*—or even TV shows like *MacMILLAN AND WIFE*—have made such an incontestable virtue of their characters' marriages (all the while staying quite inventive, playful, sexy, and suspenseful) that the whole taboo against matrimony breaks down.

The problem, as with comics' treatment of so many other topics, is bringing compassion, vision, and talent to bear against it. With a combination like that, how could the results be anything *but* exciting?

End Notes
by Peter Sanderson

The New York Times took only ten lines to report the death of Tex Avery from cancer at the age on seventy-one on August 27 and to review his career in animation. Ten lines. One might have thought that the man who was primarily responsible for the creation of Bugs Bunny would get more than that from the newspaper of record. Moreover, creating the celebrated rabbit was only one of his many achievements in the art of the animated cartoon.

There had been previous Warners cartoons featuring a cunning rabbit: Ben (Bugs) Hardaway had come up with a small, utterly lunatic rabbit and Chuck Jones had pitted Elmer Fudd against a taller hare with an odd hick voice. But it was Avery's *A Wild Hare* that the rabbit first inquired "What's Up, Doc?" and the basic Bugs Bunny character and situation first took shape: the vulgar carrot-chewing and Bronx-Brooklyn accent contrasting with the imperturbable self-assured calm and even a certain half-parodied elegance, the launching into battle only in response to the threat of the hubristic hunter, the elaborate phony death scenes, and other con games. Earlier Avery had introduced another of Warners' great cartoon characters, Daffy Duck, as the manic target of *Porky's Duck Hunt.*

Although Avery may have created his greatest characters at Warners, he made his finest films when he moved to MGM in the early 1940s. This is not to say he did not provide his new studio with memorable characters. Avery gave MGM Screwball Squirrel, the ultimate development of the Bugs-Daffy-style personality, a whirlwind in animal form who could bend any law of nature at will in the process of tormenting whatever dull-witted unfortunate crossed his path. At the other end of the spectrum was Avery's Droopy, the calm eye of the hurricane, the wimpy little basset hound who quietly proceeded along his road to triumph while his more aggressive adversaries were swept up by the chaos that surrounded him.

Perhaps the laws of the Avery universe favor Droopy because he is entirely in control of himself. Avery's other characters are often in the mold of the "humours" characters of Renaissance comedy, governed by a single overwhelming passion. It can be appetite, as with the all-devouring goat in *Billy Boy* and the legion of lawn-mower-like sheep in *Drag-a-Long Droopy*, or a very different natural urge, exemplified by the husky in *Cross-Country Detours* who races from the Arctic to California to find a forest of giant redwood trees. These characters succeed in pursuing their goals, but others, following different drives, meet retribution. These include the characters driven by hatred, like the sadistic bulldog of *Bad Luck Blackie*, or the title character in *The Cat That Hated People*, both of whom suffer considerably if comically. Then there are the characters who live in terror of being detected committing wrongdoing, as in *Deputy Droopy, Cell-Bound*, and most notably, *Northwest Hounded Police.* In the latter, a convict wolf who has broken prison races all over the world in hysterical fear of "Sgt. McPoodle" of the Mounties (Droopy) finds only him wherever he looks: Droopy materializes under a tiny rock on an almost equally tiny desert island, the wolf ends up with Droopy's face after visiting a plastic surgeon, and at the finale the wolf finds himself confronted by hundreds of Droopys speaking in unison. It is a paranoid nightmare brought to hilariously absurd life.

Most memorably, Avery dealt with human sexual passion, both acknowledging and affectionately parodying the fervor it can reach as no other master of comedy has done, either before or since. In *Little 'Tinker* scores of female forest

animals react hysterically to the crooning of a stick-thin skunk impersonating the young (and thin) Frank Sinatra: one girl rabbit passionately squeezes a tree as she raptly listens, whereupon leaves immediately burst from its bare branches. Even better are Avery's revisionist "updated" Red Riding Hood cartoons, wherein the sight of a red-haired pin-up girl doing her nightclub song and dance act sends an onlooking anthropomorphized wolf into uncontrollable fits of hilariously exaggerated sexual frenzy: pounding himself on the head with hammers, plates, and even the table, setting his nose on fire instead of his cigarette, bulging his eyes out to unbelievable proportions. In *Red Hot Riding Hood* not even death can stop the wolf: his ghost carries on whistling and howling in his place. *Little Rural Riding Hood* presents us with two wolves. There is the country wolf, who has a voice reminiscent of Goofy and absolutely no control over his sexual hysteria: he is a wonderful comedic embodiment of a mindless id in action. Then there is his cousin, the civilized city wolf, a repressive superego in lupine shape who instructs his country cousin to control himself and clobbers him with a mallet when the lesson does not take. But by the cartoon's end, the city wolf has launched into as wild a lecherous fit as his cousin. Here, as elsewhere, Avery is revealing and poking fun at (though with understanding) the strength of the primal emotions that exist in everyone, no matter how we might underestimate their hold on us.

That sympathetic understanding may not often be remarked upon in Avery cartoons, but it is there, even if it is at times understated. It is true that in the opening of *Screwball Squirrel* the title character beats up the appallingly cute little squirrel who wants to be the star of the cartoon. Yet it is also true that Avery can handle material that borders on the saccharine both skillfully and affectingly, as with the union of the lonely boy and girl skunks at the end of *Little 'Tinker*, or the triumph of the outdated warplane in its race with the newfangled jets in *Little Johnny Jet*. An Avery "villain" can be allowed to get even with the "hero" if that hero ends up taking too much pleasure in revenging himself on his opponent, as in the finale of *Ventriloquist Cat*. While Avery enjoys making comic butts of his various slow-witted characters (inspired by Lenny in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* (and for whom he apparently provided the voices himself)), he also displays a genuine affection for them, and allows them some measure of victory or at least peace at the end. For example, in his Warners cartoon *Of Fox and Hounds*, the dumb dog is continually being tricked by the fox to our amusement, but then, remarkably, the tone of the cartoon changes abruptly and considerably. An enormous, savage bear attacks the terrified dog, and we are made to feel unexpectedly deep concern for the poor dog's fate. The fox rescues the dog and they become friends, and while the fox is still able to trick the dog into leaping over fences off cliffs in hunting his prey, the dog is finally allowed the last laugh. The cartoon ends with the dog luxuriously stretching out on the mattresses he had waiting at the foot of the cliff, as he tells us "I ain't so dumb."

What is most striking about Avery's work is the way in which he plays with the cartoon medium. He uses gags that laughingly acknowledge that what we see before us is a cartoon, a wholly artificial construct: silhouetted figures from the audience pass before the screen, the characters face past a "Technicolor stops here" sign (in *Lucky Ducky*) into a landscape of blacks, whites, and grays, and the panicked wolf of *Northwest Hounded Police* runs right off the film onto a blank white screen.

This smiling self-conciousness is only part of Avery's surrealist style. At their best, Avery's cartoons build a roller-coaster momentum, hurtling the viewer breathlessly forward from gag to gag as reality becomes increasingly twisted. To remember Avery cartoons if to make a catalogue of surreal images: THE SCHOOLHOUSE TIPTOEING ALONG A "school crossing" in *Lucky Ducky;* the insanely extended jaws and tongue of the convict wolf as he goes into another of his quadruple-double-takes in *Northwest Hounded Police;* the living, animate, scissors, shovel, pencil sharpener, and other household objects that attack *The Cat That Hated People*; the bus, plane, and ocean liner that fall from the heavens toward the cursed, villainous bulldog of *Bad Luck Blackie*; the two headless giraffes joined by the neck and used as a staircase in *Half-Pint Pigmy*; the two crooks madly switching heads in *Deputy Droopy*; the seven-minute parade of slang expressions pictured literally in *Symphony in Slang* (when the narrator asks if the cat has someone's tongue, the cat displays one in his paw); and, most incredibly, the concluding image of *King-Size Canary*, with a Brobdignagian cat and mouse, arm in arm, waving goodbye to the audience as they stand upon the planet Earth which is perhaps not even one-third their size.

Over the last twenty years Avery's work was restricted to commercials, most notably those for Raid with the bugs' hysterical "takes" and surreal deaths. This year Avery was reported to be working on series for Hanna-Barbera, though these certainly would have to conform to today's over-protective anti-violence standards for Saturday morning cartoons. The great sadness in Avery's passing is that it serves as another reminder that, with some exceptions, the age of the great animated comedy is also dead, and has been for almost two decades now.

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